



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

### Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

### About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>

Ls  
19  
213

LS 19.213



Harvard College Library

FROM

*The Author.*









Ls 19.2/3

AN INTRODUCTION  
TO  
**OCTAVIA PRÆTEXTA**

---

CHICKERING



2  
9

**AN INTRODUCTION TO  
OCTAVIA PRÆTEXTA**



---

0

AN INTRODUCTION  
TO  
OCTAVIA PRÆTEXTA

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT  
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY  
IN THE FACULTY OF PHILOSOPHY AT  
COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY IN THE  
CITY OF NEW YORK

BY  
EDWARD CONNER CHICKERING

THE MARION PRESS  
JAMAICA QUEENSBOROUGH NEW YORK

1910

LS 19.213



*The Author*

BOUND DEC 26 1912

## Contents

- I—The Tragedy of the Romans.
- II—The *Fabula Prætexta*.
- III—The Authorship of the Nine Tragedies commonly ascribed to Seneca.
- IV—Seneca's Philosophy as it appears in his Tragedies.
- V—The Question of Stage Production as applied to Seneca's Tragedies.
- VI—Seneca's Rank as a Tragedian.
- VII—The Manuscripts of Seneca's Tragedies.
- VIII—The Authorship of *Octavia Prætexta*, from Early Times associated with Seneca's Tragedies.
- IX—The Date of *Octavia Prætexta*.



# I

## The Tragedy of the Romans

By most writers upon Latin literature the opinion has been held, and defended with more or less vigor, that Roman tragedy was very inferior in quality, and of little importance in comparison with other productions of the Latin writers. This view is due in part to the almost complete disappearance of the works of the tragedians, in part to the idea that the value of such Roman productions may be estimated by applying to them the standard imposed by Greek environment, or by modern. A sympathetic study of the development of the Latin drama cannot fail at least in some degree to modify this view.

That the Greek influence was strong, and that Latin tragedy derived its main outlines from Hellas, is not to be denied. There were plays before foreign influence was felt at all: the word *hister* is Etruscan, and the Atellanes, Oscan dialect pieces, were familiar long before 240 B. C. But the very fact that Livius Andronicus, Nævius, Ennius, and Pacuvius were none of them Roman citizens by birth would make an autochthonous Roman tragedy out of the question. The mimes and other native performances remained essentially undeveloped, and con-



tinued to enjoy the patronage of such part of the people as also remained undeveloped in taste and education.<sup>(1)</sup>

In support of the theory that Rome had no real tragedy, a series of arguments has been made to show that such production would have been absolutely at variance with the conditions.<sup>(2)</sup> It is claimed that Rome had no epic to compare with the Homeric poems that the Greek tragedians found ready at hand: but Livius Andronicus had translated at least the *Odyssey* into Saturnians, and it was used by the young Romans as a school book. One essential purpose of the Roman tragedians was didactic, for the conquerors were eager to learn of the history and mythology of the people they had vanquished.<sup>(3)</sup> It is said that poets at Rome occupied an inferior position: but this view is much weakened when we consider the friendship of Scipio with Ennius, of Africanus and Lælius with Terence. The Metelli would hardly have spent as much energy as they did in subduing Nævius had he been of no importance. By Cicero's time, indeed, even the actors were fêted by the great.<sup>(4)</sup>

Again it is claimed that Rome had no national religion. True, the Roman worship was formal—an es-

(1) Cf. J. C. F. Bähr, *Geschichte der römischen Literatur*. (Carlsruhe, 1868.)

(2) By Nisard, *Études Morales et Littéraires sur les Poètes latins de la Décadence*. (Paris, 1877.) The opposite view is excellently presented by Gustave Michaut, *Le Génie Latin*. (Paris, 1900.)

(3) Cf. Th. Ladewig, *Analecta Scenica in Gymnas.-Prog.* (Neustrelitz, 1848.)

(4) Cf. Cicero, *De Divin.* I. xxxvi. 79; *Pro Archia*, viii. 17, etc.

tablished church—and foreigners were expected simply to observe the requirements of the faith which they had held in their native land.<sup>(5)</sup> But even in Greece, before the life of Æschylus was ended, the purpose of plays was no longer solely religious: and in Rome it was rather the need of instruction in Greek mythology and history which united with purely dramatic value in giving the tragic stage its *raison d'être*.

As regards the difference between the two peoples in the idea of what is essential in a drama, the Roman audience did not feel the intricate detail of plot as of prime importance: but their love of grandeur and force, and their admiration for whatever produces an emotional tension, were truly tragic qualities. Their poetic feeling, though obscured by the utilitarian view they took of life, is shown by their tendency to put public inscriptions into verse (as the elogia on the tombs of the Scipios) and by their sensibility to dramatic events (as the death of Virginia and the murder of Cæsar).<sup>(6)</sup> This latter characteristic will be considered more in detail in the succeeding chapter on the *Prætexta*.

That we have lost all the early dramas does not prove that interest in them had departed or that they were worthless. Consider how little we have to depend upon in the way of manuscripts for the writings

(5) Cf. James Freeman Clarke, *Ten Great Religions*. (Boston, 1880.)

(6) Cf. Édélestand du Ménil, *Poésies Populaires Latines Antérieures au Douzième Siècle*. (Paris, 1843.)

of Tacitus: Ennius and Lucilius, save for a few scraps the grammarians preserved on account of their peculiarities, suffered a fate which he barely escaped. If the subject had become unpopular, why should Seneca and Curiatius Maternus choose tragic form?

In fine, the Roman tragedy differs from the Greek tragedy as the Romans differed from the Greeks. Reverence for the gods, that with the Greeks was a matter of the heart, and caused the outcry against Euripides that we read of in Plutarch,<sup>(7)</sup> was outside the drama as represented before the Romans. The Greeks loved the beautiful and the inspiring: the Romans were a fighting people, and the cruelty and bloodshed that would have shocked the idealistic Hellenes was to a great portion of them a delight. At the Greek theatre there was awe, quiet, breathless suspense: the smooth, clear progress of the plot was essential: at Rome, certainly in later times, the audience indulged in constant wrangling,<sup>(8)</sup> so that in order to be understood the plot had to be explained at the beginning, while afterwards the actors gave a series of declamations interspersed with songs by the chorus, much as in our modern grand opera: the very sounds in a drama produced as the Greeks had

(7) *Moralia*, p. 756, B and C.

ἀκούεις δὲ δῆπου τὸν Εὐριπίδην, ὡς ἐθουρβήθη ποιησάμενος ἀρχὴν τῆς Μελανίππης ἐκείνης (τῆς σοφῆς) 'Ζεὺς, ὅστις ὁ Ζεὺς, οὐ γὰρ οἶδα πλὴν λόγῳ, ' μεταλαβὼν δὲ χορὸν ἄλλον . . . ἥλλαξε τὸν στίχον ὡς νῦν γέγραπται 'Ζεὺς, ὡς λέλεκται τῆς ἀληθείας ὑπο ('Ἕλλην' ἔτικτεν).'

(8) Horace, *Epistles*, II. i. 183-186.

---

produced them would have been lost in the hubbub of forty thousand people.<sup>(9)</sup>

It would be superfluous to discuss in detail the merits of the five tragedians whose plays make up our subject-matter for the first century and a half after 240 B.C. We can see, however, that there is a distinct improvement as time goes on, and that the importance of the stage, in the minds of authors as well as of people, is augmented with each successive step. Andronicus and Nævius are only founders, the one of Greek tragedies in Latin, the other of Roman: but Ennius was a great man, whose interest in the drama, though with him and with his predecessors it was not the main concern, could not fail to advance its position. His nephew Pacuvius went further, and devoted his whole time to tragedy: he<sup>(10)</sup> shares with Attius the title of supremacy in Latin literature of this kind.<sup>(11)</sup>

In Attius we find the last of the real Roman tragedians. In its development the writers of drama had let go the ideas of character-drawing and psychological analysis, and had chosen the picturesque on the one side and the rhetorical and philosophical on the other. As a result the former course, chosen to please the populace, ended in the production simply of mimes and of

(9) Cf. Levée et Le Monnier, *Théâtre complet des Latins*, etc. (Paris, 1820.)

(10) Cf. Cicero, *De Optimo Genere Oratorum*, I. 2.

(11) Cicero calls Attius *summus poeta* (*Sextio*, LVI. 120). Horace calls him *altus* (*Epistles* II. i. 56); and Quintilian calls him the greatest of all (X. i. 97).

pantomimes: the latter in the writing of such tragedies as Seneca produced. So of course the poetic energy was divided, and tragedy now became weaker and less effective than it had been in the old days.<sup>(12)</sup>

Although ancient opinions differ as to the literary value of the various tragedies, nearly all are agreed that even well into the Empire the productions were successful. Livy (*Hist.* VII. ii. 8) says of Andronicus that the encores wore his voice out. The magistrates, who favored such productions as a means of gaining popular esteem, were opposed by the Senate, who feared the people would become effeminate: but the end of this opposition came with the erection of a stone theatre by Pompey in 55, and Cicero in various places shows the popularity of such plays down to the end of the Republic. They were used for political purposes, as when the assassins of Cæsar put on the stage the *Brutus* of Attius. Quintilian (X. i. 98) speaks of tragedy as much more in favor than comedy in imperial times. Indeed, in the days of Horace the passion for writing this kind of play had taken so strong a hold upon the people that he utters his warning against it to the unskilled of his time in no uncertain terms.<sup>(13)</sup> His *Ars Poetica*, however, based upon Aristotle and the Alexandrian Neoptolemus of Parium,<sup>(14)</sup> is theoretical, and was powerless to stem

<sup>(12)</sup> Cf. Michaut, *supra* cit.

<sup>(13)</sup> In *Ars Poetica*, ad fin.

<sup>(14)</sup> Cf. Henri Weil, *La Règle des trois Acteurs dans les Tragédies de Sénèque*. In *Revue Archéologique*. (Paris, 1865.)

---

the tide of popular taste. The life of a Roman in those days was one continuous tragedy, and portrayal of the most violent intensity of feeling was required in a play to make any impression upon him or to enlist any of his favor.

Early at a disadvantage because the actors were slaves, yet toward the end of the Republic tragedy took a higher position, as is attested by the success of Æsopus, and of Roscius, who was knighted by Sulla. From this time the plays became more literary than dramatic, although they were still sometimes put upon the stage. The great names in literature, as Cicero, Vergil, and Ovid, whose *Medea* is praised very highly by Horace and by Quintilian, are associated with tragedies, but Horace shows that the time had passed when they could be truly successful.<sup>(15)</sup> Under the Empire we have Pomponius Secundus, whom Quintilian (X. i. 98) calls *parum tragicum*, Seneca, and later still Curiatius Maternus. That tragedy after Augustus flourished only intermittently at best is shown by the order to commit suicide given Mamercus Scaurus<sup>(16)</sup> because Tiberius thought he saw in his *Thyestes* a reflection on his own conduct, and by the similar fate of Maternus<sup>(17)</sup> under Domitian in 91.<sup>(18)</sup>

(15) *Epistles* II. i. 186-198.

(16) Tacitus, *Annals*, VI. 29.

(17) Dio Cassius, LXVII. 12. Teuffel holds that the reference here is to another Maternus.

(18) The most important *loci classici* for this general subject of Roman Tragedy are Horace, *Epistles*, II. i., and Quintilian, *Inst. Orat.* X. i. 97-98.

## II

### The Fabula Prætexta

A convenient division of the Roman drama<sup>(1)</sup> distinguishes four general types: *palliata* and *togata*, comedy upon Greek and upon Roman subjects respectively: *crepidata* and *prætexta*, tragedy upon Greek and upon Roman subjects respectively.<sup>(2)</sup> The last-mentioned of these four is of peculiar interest.

The word *prætexta*, which is the form generally used by the earlier writers,<sup>(3)</sup> refers to the fact that in the plays were set forth the exploits of men of high rank—men who wore the *toga prætexta*, or purple-bordered robe. To explain the parallel existence of this form of the word and the spelling *prætextata*, a number of suggestions have been offered. It is stated<sup>(4)</sup> that *prætexta* does not refer to dress, but is from the verb *prætexo* directly, and refers to the fact that in these plays the background was *covered up*, as occasion demanded, and a new scene introduced—for some com-

(1) Dillenburger, note on Horace, *Ars Poetica*, 288.

(2) Some writers, noticeably Diomedes, *G. L.* III. 489 K, use the term *togata* to refer to all national dramas, both tragedy and comedy.

(3) Cicero, *Fam.* X. xxxii. 3-5. Horace, *A. P.* 288. Probus, *Vita Persii*.

(4) L. Lersch in *Rhein. Mus.* 1838-1839, pp. 518-521.

---

mentators are quite sure that in the *prætextæ* there could have been no observance of the Unity of Place.<sup>(5)</sup> Again, it is said that *prætextata* was adopted by later writers to agree in form with the words *palliata* and *togata*.<sup>(6)</sup> Welcker,<sup>(7)</sup> making no essential distinction in meaning, says the shorter form is equivalent to *having the stripe of rank*, the longer to *having the prætextæ or bordered toga*.

With one exception,<sup>(8)</sup> these plays are spoken of as close to tragedy, differing from the *crepidatæ* only in that the Romans, having no mythical heroes, had to make use of historical characters, and that the treatment was for this reason rather less ideal. We have few of them mentioned, but this is only natural. Roman poets wished to educate the people in Greek mythology: most of the historical stories treated of victories over nearby peoples, and those who were in process of assimilation would hardly take delight in seeing pictured the scenes of their humiliation. The great interval of time gave to the Greek stories a sublimity and a poetic value which recent events could not claim: more than this, the prevailing influence in Latin literature was strongly Greek during most of the period when the drama was at its best. Later, Horace's praise of those

(5) Lersch, *supra cit.*, and W. H. Grauert, in *Philologus*, II: 115-130.

(6) J. H. Neukirch, *De Fabula Togata Romanorum*. (Leipzig, 1833.)

(7) *Die Griechischen Tragödien*, (Bonn, 1841,) p. 1344.

(8) Pseudo-Acro, in note on Horace, *Ars Poetica*, 288, says comedy.



who *dare* to celebrate 'events at home,'<sup>(9)</sup> and Juvenal's *omnia græce*<sup>(10)</sup> show the trend.

Although *prætextæ* appear not to have succeeded except sporadically as acted dramas, their influence in other directions was doubtless great. That they were in numerous cases the basis of historical writings, as shown, for example, in various passages of Livy,<sup>(11)</sup> Tacitus,<sup>(12)</sup> and Plutarch,<sup>(13)</sup> is an opinion widely held: and Otto Jahn<sup>(14)</sup> has put his views on record with reference to their influence upon painting.

As to their observance of the Unities, it hardly appears why the story told of the Siege of Carthage or of Corinth should not be confined to one day as well as the Siege of Thebes: the fact that the *prætextæ* was historical does not prevent this: against Unity of Place the evidence is stronger,<sup>(15)</sup> but certainly not conclusive. Moreover, the Greek tragedians do not show uniformity in these matters.<sup>(16)</sup>

The inventor of this form of the drama was Cn.

(9) *De Arte Poetica*, 287.

(10) *Satura* VI. 187 sqq.

(11) V. xxi. 8, IX. xxv. 4, XXIII. ii. 10, XXVII. 26, XXIX. 23, XXX. 12, XL. 2-16, etc.

(12) In the Story of Octavia, for example, at the end of *Annals*, XIV.

(13) In the Stories of Clastidium, Rape of the Sabines, The Gracchi, Veii (*Camillus*, V).

(14) *Der Tod der Sophoniba auf einem Wandgemälde*. (Bonn, 1859.)

(15) Attius, *Brutus*, *Qui recte consulat, consul cluat*, suggests that the action may be partly at Rome, while Tarquinius was at Ardea.

(16) Euripides does not regard Unity of Time in *Andromache*, nor Æschylus in *Agamemnon*. The place of the action changes in the *Eumenides* of Æschylus, and in the *Ajax* of Sophocles.

Nævius, the champion of Latin manners and Latin history for the Latins. Opinions differ widely as to the number of his *prætextæ*, but it seems safe to say that he wrote two, with possibly a third. The *Clastidium*<sup>(17)</sup> pictures M. Marcellus going to the relief of that city in 222 B. C. The material has also been utilized by Propertius (v. 10), and the story is repeated by Plutarch. Identical with it is held to be<sup>(18)</sup> the mysterious *Marcellus* mentioned by Diomedes<sup>(19)</sup> and by Rabanus Maurus.<sup>(20)</sup> *Alimonia Remi et Romuli* is the full title<sup>(21)</sup> of a second work: it usually appears shortened<sup>(22)</sup> to *Romulus*, and deals with the life and experience of the Twins. Some writers<sup>(23)</sup> have insisted that it was a comedy, but the attitude of mind the Romans held toward the founding of their city would make this very improbable. Röper<sup>(24)</sup> thinks that the famous *Prayer of Hersilia*<sup>(25)</sup> may very reasonably be counted a part of it. The third play is *Lupus*,<sup>(26)</sup> and those who claim for it a separate identity<sup>(27)</sup> refer it to the early life and rescue of the boys, while

(17) Varro, *L. L.* VII. 107, Müller, and IX. 78.

(18) Cf. Grauert, *supra cit.*

(19) P. 487 Putsch.

(20) *De Arte Gramm.* I. p. 47, Col., acc. to Welcker, *Die Griechischen Tragödien*, (Bonn, 1841,) pp. 1344 sqq.

(21) Donatus on Terence, *Adelph.* IV. i. 21.

(22) Cf. Varro, *L. L.* VII. 54, M. and VII. 107 M.

(23) Cf. F. G. Welcker, *supra cit.*

(24) In *Philologus*, VII. 591.

(25) Gellius, *Noctes Atticæ*, XIII. 22.

(26) Festus, p. 270 M. Cicero, *Cato Major*, VI. 20.

(27) Ribbeck, *Die Römische Tragödie in Zeitalter der Republik*. His view is opposed by L. Müller, *Quintus Ennius*, (St. Petersburg, 1884,) p. 84.

*Romulus* deals with their later history. This would make more probable the observance of the Unities in the play.

Q. Ennius, like his rival, has left us traces of two *prætextæ*, and as in the case of Nævius one deals with the early history of Rome, the other with contemporary events. The *Sabinæ*<sup>(28)</sup> was undoubtedly upon the Rape of the Sabine Women:<sup>(29)</sup> the *Ambracia* probably treated of the capture of that town in 189 B.C. by Ennius' patron, M. Fulvius Nobilior. Although Pacuvius appears to have devoted himself almost exclusively to tragedy, there are but four fragments<sup>(30)</sup> of his which we can ascribe to a *prætexta*, and all of them belong to his *Paullus*. This play probably refers to the glorious victory of L. Æmilius Paullus over Perseus at Pydna,<sup>(31)</sup> and we may think of it as produced at the triumphal games in 168 B.C.<sup>(32)</sup>

Attius, the last of the early tragedians, again has two *prætextæ* to his credit. The *Decius* or *Æneadæ*<sup>(33)</sup> treated of the self-sacrifice of P. Decius Mus the Younger in the Samnite War, 295 B.C. The story appears in Livy,<sup>(34)</sup>

(28) Julius Victor, p. 224, Orelli. Macrobius, *Sat.* VI. v. 5.

(29) J. Vahlen, *Rhein. Mus.* XVI. 580, holds that this was a *prætexta*. T. Bergk, *Kleine Phil. Schriften*, (Halle, 1884,) vol. I. 361, refers the quotation in Victor to a *palliata*, and denies the other to a *prætexta*.

(30) In *Scenica Romanorum Poesis Fragmenta*, O. Ribbeck. (Leipzig, 1871.) Cf. Gellius, IX. xiv. 13; Macrobius, VI. v. 14.

(31) Cf. Grauert, *supra cit.*

(32) Ribbeck, *Geschichte der Römischen Dichtung*, vol. I., pp. 190-194.

(33) Nonius, 484, 4; 504, 29; 224, 10 M.

(34) Livy, X. xxviii. 13.

and its second title here suggests that Æneas actually appeared and encouraged him to do that which history attributes to representatives of three successive generations of his family.<sup>(35)</sup> The *Brutus* tells of the overthrow of the kings and the creation of consuls.<sup>(36)</sup> Ovid may have drawn from it in his description of the downfall of the Tarquins. D. Junius Brutus Callaicus, consul in 138 B. C., was a close friend of Attius, and the play may have been produced at the dedication of a temple he built to Mars from the spoils of Lusitania in the year of his consulship.<sup>(37)</sup> The *Brutus* of Cassius,<sup>(38)</sup> sometimes<sup>(39)</sup> ascribed to Cassius Parmensis, and taken to refer to the murder of Cæsar, is probably identical with this, as seems evident from the mention of Lucretia in the quotation. Further, the *Marcellus*, previously referred to, may belong to Attius, as Diomedes' other two titles are both from him.

After the time of Attius, the *prætextæ* become even less prominent than before, and we have only a very few names. Balbus Minor, the quæstor of Asinius Pollio in Spain, who was sent by Cæsar in an unsuccessful mission to try to induce Lentulus to leave the side of Pompey and return to him (in 49 B. C. at the outbreak of the Civil War), commemorated this event

(35) Cicero, *Fin.* II. xix. 61.

(36) Cf. Grauert, *supra cit.*

(37) Ribbeck, *Römische Dichtung*, *supra cit.*

(38) Cf. Varro, *L. L.* VI. 7 and VII. 72.

(39) Cf. Welcker, *supra cit.*

in a play<sup>(40)</sup> which he produced at Gades, his native town. We are told that the presentation was so realistic that it made at least the author weep. Pomponius Secundus of the time of Tiberius wrote an *Æneas*:<sup>(41)</sup> the *Armorum Judicium*<sup>(42)</sup> is hardly his work.<sup>(43)</sup>

The poet Persius wrote one play of this kind,<sup>(44)</sup> the title of which has been corrupted. It is interpreted *Vescia*, which was an Ausonian city mentioned in Livy (IX. xxv. 4), by some, while one commentator<sup>(45)</sup> in despair has amended the reading to *nescio quam*. Curiatius Maternus wrote *prætextæ* in the time of Domitian, and paid for it with his life. His *Cato*, which he read to highly appreciative audiences,<sup>(46)</sup> was the talk of the town, and when, later, his *Domitius Nero* appeared, the emperor saw in it too much suggestion of his own treatment of his wife Domitia, and summarily put an end to the poet's life. The popularity of such writing is shown by the fact that Maternus abandoned his law practice in order to devote himself wholly to it.

Livy is rich in suggestions of these plays, which may have furnished him with material for many a dramatic

(40) Cf. Cicero, *Fam.* X. xxxii. 3.

(41) Charisius, I. p. 107, Putsch.

(42) Lactantius on Statius, *Theb.* X. 841.

(43) Teuffel's *History of Roman Literature*. Cf. also Suetonius, *Divus Julius*, sec. 84, who quotes from *Pacuvii Armorum Judicium*.

(44) *Vita A. Persii Flacci, de Comm. Probi Valeri sublata*.

(45) Ribbeck, *Quæstiones Scenicae*, p. 351. See also Karl Meiser, *Über historische Dramen der Römer*. (München, 1887.)

(46) Tacitus, *Dialogus de Orat.*, 2 and 3.

passage. The story of one instance will suffice. It is related that at the Siege of Veii,<sup>(47)</sup> the Roman soldiers, who were digging a subterranean passage under the temple of Juno (Lanciani says the ruins of this temple are still to be seen<sup>(48)</sup>), heard the response to the king who was sacrificing that victory would belong to him who first completed the ceremony. The soldiers at once broke in, seized the entrails of the victims, and carried them to the Roman general, Camillus the Dictator, who immediately offered them to Juno: whereupon the city soon fell into his hands.<sup>(49)</sup> Ribbeck has given an elaborate outline of the play on which this description must have been based.<sup>(50)</sup>

Touching the connection of *prætextæ* with art, the Pompeian wall-painting which represents Sophonisba taking the cup of poison from the hand of her lover Masinissa in the presence of Scipio was doubtless based on a Roman drama.<sup>(51)</sup> As Jahn points out, the illustration would much more probably be founded upon a play than form a foundation for one; and Polybius in history appears not to have told the story: the most dramatic point in the tale as recounted by Livy<sup>(52)</sup> has

(47) Livy, V. xxi. 8.

(48) *Pagan and Christian Rome*, (Boston and New York, 1893,) p. 64.

(49) Plutarch, *Camillus*, V., has told the story, but has misunderstood *prosecuisset*, thinking it meant *follow*.

(50) O. Ribbeck, *Rheinisches Museum*, XXXVI. 321. *Ein historisches Drama*.

(51) O. Jahn, *Der Tod der Sophoniba auf einem Wandgemälde*, *supra cit.*

(52) XXIX. 23, and XXX. 12 sqq.

been seized upon. Rabanus Maurus in his list *Brutus vel Decius, item Marcellus vel Africanus et his similia* may refer to this very play. Certainly the will of the gods as determining human affairs, a theme with the Roman dramatists, is most clearly portrayed in the picture.

The *Octavia* ascribed to Seneca, and a play of the same name referred to Mæcenas, will be considered in a later chapter.

### III

## The Authorship of the Nine Tragedies commonly ascribed to Seneca

From the time of Justus Lipsius the question of the authorship of the nine tragedies ascribed to Seneca (omitting for the time *Octavia*) has been a subject of discussion. Lipsius himself,<sup>(1)</sup> using the method of subjective criticism, distributed the plays among three authors, and regarded not more than two of the nine as good enough to belong to the time of the philosopher. Daniel Heinsius<sup>(2)</sup> thought there were four writers; the abundance or rarity of Stoic doctrines, and the comparative amount of actual portrayal of horrors, he makes one basis of discrimination. Erasmus,<sup>(3)</sup> still certainly not using scientific method, came to the conclusion that none of them could have been by Seneca the Philosopher. Among critics of the nineteenth century, Levée<sup>(4)</sup> ascribes them to Novatus or Gallio, who

<sup>(1)</sup> See his preface in J. C. Schröder, *L. Annæi Senecæ Tragædiæ cum notis*, etc. (Delphis, 1728.)

<sup>(2)</sup> Cf. his *De Tragg. Auctoribus*, in Schröder, *supra cit.*

<sup>(3)</sup> Erasmus, *Ciceronians* [in preface to the Lemaire edition of Seneca's tragedies (Paris, 1829)]: (*Senecæ*) *tragædiæ, quæ probantur a doctis, vix videntur a Seneca scribi potuisse.*

<sup>(4)</sup> Levée et Le Monnier, *Théâtre Complet des Latins*, etc., (Paris, 1820-1823,) vol. 12.



he says is identical with Seneca Tragicus; although later he seems to waver in his judgment: Richter<sup>(5)</sup> and Welcker<sup>(6)</sup> have held that we cannot think of their authorship as tradition through the MSS. has led us to regard it. Nisard in one place<sup>(7)</sup> suggests the possibility that the tragedies may be a *Senecanum opus*—the joint work of Marcus Rhetor, Lucius the Philosopher, Mela, and Lucan.

The body of criticism which admits that the author, at least of most of the plays, is Seneca, but denies them to the philosopher, depends mainly upon two passages in ancient writers. In the first, Martial, I. lxi. 7,

*Duosque Senecas unicumque Lucanum  
Facunda loquitur Corduba,*

it is held that by *the two Senecas* reference is made to a philosopher and to a tragic writer. Why it is not much more natural, however, to think of Marcus Rhetor, and Lucius the Philosopher, especially as Lucan's name follows to represent the third generation, is certainly not clear. Martial, IV. xl.,

*Et docti Senecæ ter numeranda domus,*

may easily be explained as referring to the same three.<sup>(8)</sup>

(5) G. Richter, *De Seneca Tragædiarum Auctore*. (Bonn, 1862.)

(6) *Die Griechischen Tragödien*, (Bonn, 1841.) (*Rhein. Mus. Suppl.* 3.)

(7) *Études Morales et Littéraires*, etc. (Paris, 1877.)

(8) J. G. C. Klotzsch, *De Annæo Seneca Uno Tragædiarum quæ supersunt omnium Auctore*, (in Lemaire above cited) suggests that the idea of three was sacred to poets, especially to Martial, and that he may have used it in compliment to Polla Argentaria, the widow of Lucan, who was still living.

The other statement is more definite: a letter of Sidonius Apollinaris to Magnus Felix:<sup>(9)</sup>

*Quorum unus colit hispidum Platona  
Incassumque suum monet Neronem,  
Orchestram quatit alter Euripidis,  
Pictum fœcibus Æschylon secutus  
Aut plaustris solitum sonare Thespin  
· · · · ·  
Pugnam tertius ille Gallicani  
Dixit Cæsaris, etc.*

Sidonius is shown even in this passage, by the character of his reference to Æschylus and by his confusion of the Gallic and Civil Wars, to be extremely untrustworthy: further, living in the fifth century, he is a long distance from the first. It seems beyond question that he mistook the passage above quoted from Martial, just as some later commentators have mistaken it.

A confusion in the MSS., which sometimes use the prænomen M., sometimes L., for the author, has strengthened the arguments against the philosopher. But such a confusion, with *Marcus* well known as the name of the Rhetor and of a son of Gallio, is not astonishing for the times when the MSS. were written. Most ancient writers, in speaking of the plays, use simply the name *Seneca*, whereas if they had meant one other than the well-known, the philosopher, it

(9) *Carmen* IX. lines 232 sqq.

seems they would have said so. Quintilian especially<sup>(10)</sup> appears to feel no doubt at all that his readers will understand him as speaking of the tutor of Nero. That he does not mention the tragedies in his general list of Latin literature is explained by his custom of referring to the best-known works of each author he mentions. The philosopher was certainly interested in tragedy, as is proven by the great number of tragic fragments in his works.<sup>(11)</sup> Pliny the Younger<sup>(12)</sup> speaks of Annæus Seneca as writing 'light verses' (*versiculos severos parum*).

Dismissing then the idea of someone other than the philosopher as author of most of the tragedies, we may consider ancient authorities for the individual plays. Quintilian<sup>(13)</sup> speaks of Seneca's *Medea* and quotes from it. Terentianus Maurus<sup>(14)</sup> quotes from *Hercules Furens*, Probus<sup>(15)</sup> from *Troades* (*Hecuba*), Lactantius<sup>(16)</sup> from *Thyestes*, Priscian<sup>(17)</sup> from *Phædra* (*Hippolytus*), and Aldhelmus<sup>(18)</sup> from *Agamemnon*; and all these speak of Seneca as the author. An ingenious and painstaking

(10) *Inst. Orat.* IX. ii. 8, and X. i. 125.

(11) Cf. Kurt Liedloff, *Die Benutzung griechischer und römischer Muster in Senecas Troades und in Agamemnon* (in *Jahresbericht zu Grimma*, 1902).

(12) *Epistles* V. 3.

(13) *Inst. Orat.* IX. ii. 8.

(14) *De Metris*, 2672-2675 Keil.

(15) *Treatise on Ultimate Syllables*, p. 224 Keil.

(16) On Statius *Theb.* IV. 530.

(17) *Inst.* VI. 68.

(18) *Ad Acircium Regem*.

investigator<sup>(19)</sup> has gathered references, more or less distinct, to Seneca's plays in nineteen writers up to the thirteenth century, but apart from those just mentioned either Seneca is not spoken of as the author or the writers are not early enough to be of value for our purpose. Nearly all the commentators since the controversy about authorship began have accepted *Hippolytus*, *Medea*, and *Troades* as Seneca's, relying both on internal evidence and on certain of the ancient references given above. In comparatively recent years *Hercules Furens*, *Thyestes*, and *Phænissæ* have also come to their place. The battle has waged most violently about *Œdipus*, *Agamemnon*, and *Hercules Œtæus*.

To the first two of these three the objections have been mainly on the ground of metrical peculiarities, as they employ a much greater variety of measures in the choruses than do the other plays. The final word on this subject appears to have been said by Leo<sup>(20)</sup> in 1878, who claims them both for the philosopher. In regard to the *Hercules Œtæus*, the alleged difficulties lie in its being a second play about Hercules: in its violation of the Unity of Place: in the double chorus: in the length: and in an apparent incoherence in the plot. These objections are met by Melzer<sup>(21)</sup> in 1890, and are taken

(19) R. Peiper in *L. Annæi Senecæ Tragædiæ*. (Leipzig, 1902.)

(20) *L. Annæi Senecæ Tragædiæ, accedit Octavia prætextata*. (Berlin, 1879.)

(21) *De Hercule Œtæo Annæana*, P. Melzer. (Chemnitz, 1890.) We must also consider in this connection Alfonsius Steinberger, *Hercules Œtæus fabula*

up in detail by Ackermann<sup>(22)</sup> in 1905. He offers convincing parallels from other well-known plays, mainly Greek, to all the objections, and regards the tragedy as the work of Seneca, originally one and undivided. During the course of these discussions the contention that the nine are the work of the philosopher was upheld by Plutarch<sup>(23)</sup> and Scaliger<sup>(24)</sup> among the early writers, and by such men as Lucian Müller,<sup>(25)</sup> Daunou,<sup>(26)</sup> Bähr,<sup>(27)</sup> Nisard,<sup>(28)</sup> and von Ranke<sup>(29)</sup> in recent times.

Müller speaks of all nine as on the same level as regards quality. Daunou and Richter<sup>(30)</sup> say that such differences in merit as certain critics have noticed in comparing the individual plays are no proof of a various authorship, as no writer can be found to produce all his work on precisely the same plane. Bähr claims that there is manifest the same genius, the rhetorical-declamatory spirit, through them all. Nisard asserts that

*num sit a Seneca scripta* [in *Abhandlungen der Klassischen Altertums-Wissenschaft, Wilhelm von Christ dargebracht*. (München, 1891.)]: this author, although admitting the play to be very poor, upholds Melzer in claiming it for Seneca. For the opposing view, cf. *De L. Annæi Senecæ Poetæ Tragici casuum usu*, etc., Augustus Preising. (Monasterii Guestfaliæ, 1891.)

(22) *De Senecæ Hercule Etæo*, Æmilius Ackermann. (Mapurgi Cattorum, 1905.)

(23) On the authority of Greslou, *Tragédies de L. A. Sénèque* (Paris, 1834) (in *Bibliothèque Latine-Française*).

(24) *Ep.* 414 and 247.

(25) *De Re Metrica Poetarum Latinorum*, (Leipzig, 1861,) pp. 53-54. Also cf. *Jahrbücher für Philologie*, vol. 89, (Leipzig, 1864,) pp. 409-425.

(26) In *Journal des Savans*. (Paris, August, 1822.)

(27) *Geschichte der römischen Literatur*, Carlsruhe, 1868, vol. I. pp. 181-232.

(28) *Études Morales et Littéraires*, etc., supra cit.

(29) *Die Tragödien Senecas* [in *Abhandlungen und Versuche* (Leipzig, 1888)].

(30) *De Seneca Tragædiarum Auctore*, supra cit.

the learned, conscientious critic often knows too much, and that his judgment is blinded by minutiae: that Seneca's well-known ideas on death and fatality permeate all the tragedies: that in fact they may be called "talks among Stoics, with tragic garb and heroic names." Hosius<sup>(31)</sup> uses a wealth of quotation to show that Lucan had all nine of them before him when he wrote the *Pharsalia*.

Various conjectures have also been made as to the time when the different plays saw the light. In view of their boldness in denouncing tyranny and tyrants, it has seemed better to attribute some of them to Seneca's younger, bolder years—the time of his banishment in Corsica. This view is strengthened by the fact that in the time of Claudius public readings of this sort were at the height of their popularity. In a letter written to his mother during his exile<sup>(32)</sup> he mentions indulging in lighter studies: on the other hand in Tacitus (*Annals* XIV. 52) he is said to have written more verse since Nero came to like it.

At least two of the early writers have undertaken to set more definitely the dates of certain plays. Lipsius<sup>(33)</sup> refers the *Thebais* (*Phænissæ*) to the time of the Civil Wars, saying it is good enough for the Augustan Age. The *Medea* he connects with the time when Claudius

<sup>(31)</sup> *Lucanus und Seneca: in Jahrbücher für Philologie*, 1892, p. 350.

<sup>(32)</sup> *Consolatio ad Helviam*, XX.

<sup>(33)</sup> In Schröder, *supra cit.*

was gaining control over Britain. Sherburne<sup>(34)</sup> also refers *Medea* to this time: says the *Hippolytus* was written just after the eclipse in 46: and the *Troades* after Seneca's return from banishment, not much later than the time when Nero's purpose of putting away Octavia was discovered. Hosius,<sup>(35)</sup> with Lucan's *Pharsalia* in mind, regards the nine as written between 41 and 49 A.D.

(34) Sir Edward Sherburne, *The Tragedies of L. Annaeus Seneca the Philosopher*, trans. (London, 1702.)

(35) *Lucanus und Seneca*, supra cit.

## IV

### Seneca's Philosophy as it appears in his Tragedies

Any value which may be derived from a comparison of Seneca's plays with his prose writings, on philosophical grounds, will result from our recognizing a similar method, a similar attitude of mind, in dealing with the philosophical problems of the day. A close accord between individual sentences, particularly in form, will point as much to conscious imitation by another as to identity of authorship—possibly more so. With this fact in view, we shall take a few fundamental principles which belong to Seneca as a philosopher, and try to find those principles illustrated in the tragedies.

The general consensus of opinion, indeed, his own statements,<sup>(1)</sup> connect his views fundamentally with the teachings of Zeno of Citium, but that Seneca was not a very strict Stoic must be conceded: his earlier epistles regularly close with a line from Epicurus.<sup>(2)</sup> Indeed,

<sup>(1)</sup> Cf. e. g. *Epistles to Lucilius*, 2. *Hodiernum hoc est, quod apud Epicurum nactus sum (soleo enim et in ALIENA castra transire, non tanquam transfuga, sed tanquam explorator). Honesta, inquit, res est, læta paupertas.*

<sup>(2)</sup> Cf. the above, also *Epistles* VII., VIII., XII., etc. *Ep. XII., Quod verum est, meum est: perseverabo Epicurum tibi ingerere*, and *Ep. XXXIII., Non sumus sub rege*, etc., show his attitude.



nearly all the most important tenets of the sect are in places disregarded or contradicted in his writings. Stoicism, it is true, contained many elements of belief which were distinctly convenient for a man living in the wild times of Nero, and this determined the prevailing tone of Seneca's doctrine. But, like Cicero, though far less thoroughly, he undertakes to shape a philosophy of his own, using the best in each of the various writers who have preceded him. It is the ethical side with which we must mainly be concerned in discussing the tragedies, and in fact it is Ethics which with Seneca holds a far more important place than either Logic or Physics.

No review of his philosophical beliefs can leave out of account his Rhetorical Spirit and the tendency of the times toward exaggeration: for it is the influence of these that carries all his doctrines to an extreme.<sup>(3)</sup> Perhaps he deviates farthest from Stoicism in his portrayal of the emotions in his plays: the Stoic idea, the scorn of feeling, he expounds to be sure in *Epistle CXVI*: but if one quality is more prominent than all others in his characters it is that tendency toward a passionate excess.

Of the recognized Stoical tenets possibly the most noticeable in Seneca is Fatalism: not that of the Greeks,

(3) Cf. Richard M. Smith, *De Arte Rhetorica in L. A. Seneca Tragædiis perspicua*. (Lipsiæ, 1885.)

which was religious, but one purely philosophical, absolute, hopeless. Think of the moral attitude that could produce this: *Nihil cogor, nihil patior invitus . . . accepimus peritura perituri* (*De Prov.* V.). Then see the same extreme of feeling in

*Fatis agimur, cedite fatis.*

. . . . .  
 . . . . . *Multi ad fatum*

*Venere suum, dum fata timent.* (*Œd.* 980-94.)

And yet his characters are by no means always resigned to fate, but the Stoic pride of man as almost a god himself gives them courage sometimes to oppose even destiny. In *Hercules Œtæus* the hero certainly does not show the resignation we find in Sophocles' portrayal.

Closely connected with this idea was Seneca's estimate of Death. Contempt for it is shown by nearly all his characters: "Phædra, Deianira, Jocasta, fall by their own hands: Astyanax and Polyxena meet death eagerly: Cassandra, Electra, Antigone, show the same masculine constancy: it is a refuge for Œdipus and Hercules in shame, Theseus and Thyestes in calamity: even Jason and Ægisthus, otherwise cowards, are brave toward death."<sup>(4)</sup> An exaggerated Stoicism not only made it justifiable for a man to take his own life when the troubles of this world were too heavy to be borne:

<sup>(4)</sup> In J. W. Cunliffe, *The Influence of Seneca on Elizabethan Tragedy*. (London, 1893.)

(the Epicureans welcomed death as a relief and the end of all things when the pleasures of life began to be outweighed by its pain:) but it was a privilege, and one of which a man could not and must not be deprived, to take his way to the next world when inclination led him.

Perhaps the extreme phase of this doctrine is illustrated in a letter to Lucilius (*Epistle LXXVII.*), where the story is told of the young Marcellinus. He was ill, and had the prospect of a year or two with the doctors, after which he had every reason to expect complete recovery. He considered the matter from all sides, and decided that death by his own hand was easier and pleasanter, as well as being less expensive. This general view of suicide as a sacred privilege is set forth in *Epistles* I. xii. 10, and in *De Providentia* VI. Good illustrations appear in *Phænissæ* 98, sq., and again in 146–153: the first is sufficient to show the trend:

. . . . . *Qui cogit mori*  
*Nolentem in æquo est quique properantem impedit;*  
*Nec tamen in æquo est: alterum gravius reor:*  
*Malo imperari quam eripi mortem mihi.*

Polyxena's two deaths, at the hand of Pyrrhus and at her own, emphasize the same idea. Finally, Seneca himself, in accord with the characters he portrayed, met death bravely by suicide.

In the matter of that 'something after death,' Seneca expresses most contradictory opinions. A strict Stoic held that the soul outlived the body, but at the end of a certain cosmic period everything was dissolved in a general conflagration and began anew from God, its one immortal source.<sup>(5)</sup> To the Epicureans the soul was composed of material atoms, and perished with the body.<sup>(6)</sup> These views are set forth respectively in *Epistles* XXXVI. and XXX., while *Epistle* LIV. is rather non-committal. Each one of these *Epistles* may be paralleled by a passage in *Troades*, showing successively the different attitudes of the same mind. Verses 157 sqq.:

*Felix Priamus dicimus omnes:  
Secum excedens sua regna tulit;  
Nunc Elysii nemoris tutis  
Errat in umbris interque pias  
Felix animas Hectora quærit.*

Verses 392 sqq.:

*Ut calidis fumus ab ignibus  
Vanescit, spatium per breve sordidus,  
. . . . .  
Sic hic, quo regimur, spiritus effluet.  
Post mortem nihil est, ipsaque mors nihil.*

(5) Cf. B. F. Cocker, *Christianity and Greek Philosophy*. (New York.) *Loci classici* are Diogenes Laertius, *Book* VII., and Cicero, *De Finibus* and *De Natura Deorum*.

(6) Cf. Cocker, and Joseph Haven, *A History of Philosophy, Ancient and Modern*. (New York, 1876.) *Loci Classici* are Diogenes Laertius, X. 64 and 124; Lucretius, III. 418 and 842 sqq.

Verses 407 sq.:

*Quæris quo jaceas post obitum loco?  
Quo non nata jacent.*

The innate nobility of the human soul and the nearness of Man to The Most High is clearly illustrated in Seneca. *Quærendum est, quod non fiat in dies deterius, cui non possit obstari. Quid hoc est? Animus: sed hic rectus, bonus, magnus. Quid aliud voces hunc, quam Deum in humano corpore hospitantem? Epistle XXXI.* A very similar spirit appears, perhaps somewhat exaggerated, in *Œdipus* 765-767:

*Obisse nostro Laium scelere autumant  
Superi inferique, sed animus contra innocens  
Sibique melius quam deis notus negat.*

Again it is shown in *Medea*, 176:

*Fortuna opes auferre, non animum potest.*

In this same play the striking words *Medea superest* (v. 166) and later *Medea nunc sum* (v. 910) are the proud cries of the individual against the world.

The possession which gives the soul this preëminence—the *summum bonum* of the Stoic philosophy—is *Virtus*. The doctrine is set forth in various places in *De Vita Beata*, crystallized, perhaps, in Sec. XVI., *In virtute posita est vera felicitas*: again we find it in *Epistle XCII.*, *Ita miser quidem esse, qui virtutem habet, non potest.* In the plays, the general development of

---

*Hercules Œtæus* perhaps suggests it most strongly, and it is summed up in *Hercules Furens* 463:

*Quemcumque miserum videris, hominem scias:  
Quemcumque fortem videris, miserum neges.*

High position upon earth, however, produces neither tranquility of mind nor nobility of spirit. The troubles of the tyrant are set forth in *Epistle CV.*: *Qui timetur, timet: nemo potest terribilis esse secure*; and again in *De Ira*, II. 2. Creon voices similar sentiments:

*Qui sceptrâ duro sævus imperio regit,  
Timet timentes: metus in auctorem redit.*  
(*Œdipus* 705-706.)

But the man who is unfortunate enough to be in this position gets no pity from Seneca: tyranny and its abuses he enlarges upon in the latter part of *De Ira*, while in *Hercules Furens*, 922 sqq., he makes the hero say:

*Victima haut ulla amplior  
Potest magisque opima mactari Jovi,  
Quam rex iniquus.*

Many parallels have been drawn between Seneca's prose writings and the New Testament teachings:<sup>(7)</sup> while we may not be able to quote Christian doctrine from the plays, we can at least see a spirit in places which is unlike anything in Latin literature before it,

(7) Cf. Hurst and Whiting, *Seneca's Moral Essays*. (New York, 1877.)

and which reminds us strongly of the 'New Sect.' The answers of Megara to Lycus, for example, when she must choose between his hand and death, show the same attitude as that displayed by the early Christian martyrs. Such are the words *Cogi qui potest nescit mori*, *Hercules Furens*, 426. In *Agamemnon*, too, our author endeavors to enlist sympathy for Clytemnestra—one who has sinned and is repentant.<sup>(8)</sup>

Seneca must have believed in the existence of a God: his prose writings place that beyond dispute. But in contrast with Euripides, who found it most uncomfortable even to call the fact into question as possibly untrue,<sup>(9)</sup> Seneca at the end of *Medea* (vv. 1026–1027) makes Jason deny it in no uncertain terms, and Thyestes on his return home says: *Si sunt tamen di*. (*Thyestes*, v. 407.)

Though we cannot claim this as the author's personal doubt, it has a value in connection with the inconsistencies already noted in the belief in Immortality. The confusion of religious and philosophical opinions in this First Century had reached the extreme. Thinking men did not know what view to take of our life, and moral chaos was the result. The extreme in virtue, the mania for the impossible, was opposed to the extreme in vice. Just so men were at a loss what view

<sup>(8)</sup> J. L. Klein, *Geschichte des Dramas*, (Leipzig, 1865,) vol. II., has not a little to say on the Christian ideas in the plays.

<sup>(9)</sup> Cf. Plutarch, *Moralia*, p. 756 B and C, in a previous note.

to take of death, and wavered between a belief in immortality and a creed that involved the soul's absolute obliteration.<sup>(10)</sup>

(10) Interesting discussions of the parallelism in the prose and poetry of Seneca may be found in G. A. Simcox, *A History of Latin Literature*, vol. 2 (New York, 1883): Nisard, *Études*, etc. (part I.): von Ranke, *Die Tragödien Senecas*: René Pichon, *Histoire de la Littérature latine* (Paris, 1898).



## V

# The Question of Stage Production as applied to Seneca's Tragedies

Before we can discuss the quality of Seneca's plays we must consider a question upon which our estimate of them will in great measure depend—How were the tragedies presented to the public?

Early and contemporary writers give us little definite information. The plays of the first great tragedians were put upon the stage, as we may infer from many authorities, such as Horace (*Epist.* II. i. 60).<sup>(1)</sup> If Lucian Müller's statement is to be accepted,<sup>(2)</sup> Pollio, Ovid, Varius, and probably Pomponius had their works acted. Ovid himself (*Tristia* V. vii. 27) shows that he did not intend his *Medea* for the stage, but it may have appeared there none the less (cf. vv. 25 and 26).<sup>(3)</sup> The *Thyestes* of Varius was produced, according to a MS. of the eighth century discovered by M. Jules Quicherat,<sup>(4)</sup>

(1) . . . *Arcto stipata theatro*  
*Spectat Roma potens.*

(2) *Fabrbücher für Philologie*, vol. 89, pp. 409-425. (Leipzig, 1864.)

(3) Vv. 25-28. *Carmina quod pleno saltari nostra theatro,*  
*Versibus et plaudi scribis, amice, meis,*  
*Nil equidem feci, tu scis hoc ipse, theatris,*  
*Musa nec in plausus ambitiosa mea est.*

(4) Cf. G. Boissier, *Les Tragédies de Sénèque ont-elles été représentées?* (Paris, 1861.)

at the games celebrated by Augustus after the Battle of Actium, and the author received a million sesterces for it. As for Pomponius Secundus, Quintilian,<sup>(5)</sup> Tacitus,<sup>(6)</sup> and Pliny<sup>(7)</sup> all seem to show that his plays were produced. We hear nothing further until the time of St. Cyprian and St. Augustine, who both say (*Ad Donat.* and *De Civit. Dei* XI. 8 resp.) that tragedies were represented in their time; and even then the Orator Libanius of the same epoch says precisely the opposite.<sup>(8)</sup> On Seneca history is perfectly silent (if we except the testimony of Pontanus to the very doubtful statement of Xiphilinus, to the effect that Nero himself played in the *Medea*, *Troades*, and *Hippolytus*).<sup>(9)</sup>

The other method of presentation, reading before a more or less carefully selected circle, gradually came into fashion as the public audiences became more and more boisterous, and had real interest in nothing above the pantomimes and gladiatorial shows. The development of drama had been in two directions, one of which led it to emphasize scenic display, and resulted in the extreme form of these very pantomimes and shows, the

(5) X. i. 98. *Eorum quos viderim longe princeps Pomponius Secundus, quem senes parum tragicum putabant, eruditione ac nitore præstare confitebantur.*

(6) *Annals* XI. 13. *Is Carmina scænæ dabat.*

(7) *Ep.* VII. 11. *Itaque Pomponius Secundus (hic scriptor tragædiarum) si quid forte familiarior tollendum, ipse retinendum arbitraretur, dicere solebat ad populum provoco: atque ita ex populi vel silentio vel assensu aut suam aut amici sententiam sequebatur.*

(8) Cf. Boissier, *supra cit.*

(9) J. G. Pontanus, *De Auctoribus Tragædiarum*, etc. [In Schröder, *Senecæ Tragædiæ*, etc. (Delphis, 1728.)]

other to put stress on philosophy and moralizing for the learned. The growth, too, of the schools of rhetoric, and the safety with which one's sentiments might be expressed there, led to a willingness among authors to let their plays remain unacted: the more so in the case of those whose theme was a protest against tyranny and tyrants.

Such reading was not original with the Romans, for as far back as the middle of the fourth century B. C. Chæremon had produced closet-plays for the Greeks.<sup>(10)</sup> The first Roman writer of this sort was Asinius Pollio<sup>(11)</sup>; and by the time of Claudius such public readings were at the height of their popularity. Curiatius Maternus, who flourished in the time of Seneca and a little later, would no doubt have liked to see his plays acted, but it is not probable that he accomplished his wish.<sup>(12)</sup>

With regard to Seneca's plays alone, the commentators of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, particularly Lipsius and Daniel Heinsius, appear to have had no doubt whatever that they were acted just as were the comedies of Plautus and Terence. Lipsius suggests<sup>(13)</sup> that when the murders were to occur, Nero simply

<sup>(10)</sup> Cf. Aristotle, *Ars Rhetorica*, III. xii. 2. βασιλεῖσιν δὲ οἱ ἀναγνώσκειν, οὐκ ἔστιν ἔθος.

<sup>(11)</sup> Cf. Seneca, *Controversiæ*, Lib. IV. præf. Pollio Asinius numquam admissa multitudine declamavit: nec illi ambitio in studiis defuit: primus enim omnium Romanorum advocatis hominibus scripta sua recitavit.

<sup>(12)</sup> Cf. Tacitus, *De Orat.* XI.

<sup>(13)</sup> Cf. Boissier, *supra cit.*

caused condemned criminals to be put in the place of the regular actors, and thus the demands of realism and the thirst of the populace for blood were at once satisfied. Heinsius says<sup>(14)</sup> that in the *Hercules Furens* the Megara was undoubtedly killed upon the stage, and cites the episode of Icarus mentioned in Suetonius<sup>(15)</sup>: certainly we cannot prove that it was not intentional to have Dædalus' son fall and besprinkle the great emperor of Rome with his blood.

In more recent times Lessing explains the difficulty of the murders in the *Hercules Furens* in a less revolting way, by ingeniously assuming that the hero chased his family in and out behind the scenes, and that the actual death blow was thus struck out of the audience's view: while at the front of the stage Amphitryon told the people what was going on.<sup>(16)</sup> As we are told that the light of day was obscured the idea is most plausible. Even the worst view we can take of such production would make it a refinement upon the cruelty which was practised in those times every day: and for a Greek parallel we need only to consider the *Bacchæ* of Euripides.

For external evidence in favor of scenic production we have Nero's well-known passion for appearing on

<sup>(14)</sup> Cf. J. L. Klein, *Geschichte des Dramas*. (Leipzig, 1865.)

<sup>(15)</sup> Nero XII. *Primo statim conatu juxta cubiculum ejus decedit, ipsumque cruore respersit.*

<sup>(16)</sup> Cf. G. E. Lessing, *Sämtliche Schriften*. Lachmann-Muncker, vol. VI. pp. 167-242. (Stuttgart, 1890.)

the stage: before the days of his wilder and more public excesses he played in his own theatre in his gardens across the Tiber; and he was especially fond of having gods and goddesses made to look like him and like his favorite women.<sup>(17)</sup> We can imagine his appearing in the *Hercules*, in the rôle of the hero himself. The Spanish Seneca, with grim humor, perhaps, may have pictured his emperor as the infuriated bull pursuing the toreadors in the arena at Cordova.

On the other hand, Seneca's connection in literature with Pomponius Secundus is rather against the idea of production. It was due to the effect of the latter's writings that the Censor Claudius put the ban upon all such plays.<sup>(18)</sup> Men had tired of the drama, and, indifferent to terrors, liked rather the lurid rhetoric and Stoic fatalism with which Seneca's tragedies are filled. It is of course possible that the treatment of Pomponius was unusual: and it is true that he was *consularis* at the time, so Seneca would not have acted beneath his dignity in putting his work on the stage. But certainly the external evidence cannot convince one that the plays were acted.

The general character of the tragedies certainly agrees

<sup>(17)</sup> Cf. Suetonius, *Nero* XXI. *Tragœdias quoque cantavit personatus, heroum deorumque item heroidum ac dearum personis effectis ad similitudinem oris sui et feminæ, prout quamque deligeret.*

<sup>(18)</sup> Cf. Tacitus, *Annals*, XI. 13. *At Claudius . . . theatralium populi lasciviam severis edictis increpuit, quod in P. Pomponium consulem (is carmina scænæ dabat) inque feminas inlustres probra jecerat.*

with what must have been dramatic necessities in Seneca's time. Before the 30,000 boisterous people who made up a popular audience a comparatively disconnected series of speeches, the voice raised to the highest pitch and helped out by flutes, was the only form of presentation. Delicacy in development of the plot was out of the question, and all a playwright could do was to strive for effect by masses.<sup>(19)</sup> The whole form suggests to us most forcibly the modern grand opera, and Lessing has said that the very slightest modifications would make one out of the *Hercules Furens*.<sup>(20)</sup> Horace's warning<sup>(21)</sup> shows that such things must have happened on the stage, otherwise he would not have mentioned them. Seneca follows the Rule of Three Actors very carefully,<sup>(22)</sup> and for plays intended simply to be read this was certainly unnecessary. The taste of the people would never have rejected them on the ground of their brutality.

The question of the naming of the players also has an important bearing on the matter. With hardly an exception each player, before he appears, has his identity disclosed in the dialogue or in a speech, unless his character would be shown by his dress (as would be

(19) Cf. Levée et Le Monnier, *Théâtre Complet des Latins*. (Paris, 1820-1823.) Horace, *Epistles*, II. i. 184 sqq., gives a good picture of the conditions.

(20) Cf. Lessing, *supra cit.*

(21) *De Arte Poetica*, 185. *Ne pueros coram populo Medea trucidet.*

(22) Cf. H. Weil, *La Règle des Trois Acteurs dans les Tragédies de Sénèque*. (In *Revue Archéologique*, pp. 21-35.) (Paris, 1865.)

true of messengers, for example). In plays to be read this would have been unnecessary, as the name was usually pronounced when the new character appeared.<sup>(23)</sup> Some passages, too, would be made much clearer by stage production, whereas in reading the selection of pronouns makes them somewhat ambiguous.<sup>(24)</sup> As great a critic as Lessing says that Seneca was undoubtedly familiar with the rules of the stage. That the plays could be produced is shown by Erasmus,<sup>(25)</sup> who speaks of a Petrus or Thomas Phædrus, relating that in the fifteenth century he acted Seneca's *Phædra* at Rome with great applause and thereby won his cognomen.

On the other side: as concerns the general form, the rhetorical training of Seneca would account for the succession of speeches, sometimes without artistic connection; and in plays that are read it is the separate parts, rather than a plot brilliantly executed, which appeal to an audience. In Seneca the effect is sought rather in the diction than in the situation, and the eye would seldom help in interpretation. The minute beauties, the appeal to the intellect, is what we notice; the appeal to the finer feelings is rare indeed. Seneca's following the Rule of Three Actors simply shows that what had been a stage necessity with the Greeks was

(23) Cf. C. Lindskog, *Studien zum Antiken Drama*. (Lund, 1897.)

(24) Cf. *Troades*, 924, *banc*; *Pbænissæ*, 498, *hic*.

(25) Cf. reference to Erasmus, *Ep.* XXIII. 5, in F. Vater, *Miscellanies*, in *Jahn's Archiv*, vol. XIX., pp. 565-618. (Leipzig, 1853.)

an article of faith with the Romans. Though the people might have enjoyed the brutality, such portrayal in public would certainly be inconsistent with the idea of Seneca we get in the *Moral Treatises*: but this is by no means equally true when we look at the other side of his character, and remember that in his last years Seneca's hope of preserving Nero's morals had given way completely to his hope of preserving his own life. Really the strongest definite argument against production lies in the silence of ancient writers on the subject: for the enemies of Nero's tutor would never knowingly have let slip so good a chance for just and scathing condemnation. But this is not conclusive, and we have the years from 65 to 68 to consider, when any scruples Seneca might have had could have been most unscrupulously forgotten.

Taken together, the most that our available material proves in favor of production is that it may have been in the writer's mind: in his thoughts, even as he wrote, he saw the stage before him: but the evidence against the actual appearance of the plays upon that stage is not strong enough to deny free scope to the fancy of any man who would add one more to the list of enormities practised in Nero's reign: a new way of killing was ever acceptable to him.<sup>(26)</sup>

<sup>(26)</sup> The fullest discussions of the subject may be found in Boissier and in Lessing, *supra cit.*



## VI

### Seneca's Rank as a Tragedian

The first general judgment of Seneca, that expressed by Quintilian (X. i. 125), mentions at least the main characteristic of his writings which, after eighteen centuries, still appeals to us as true. He says Seneca has thoughts and sentiments which show the highest genius, but his great fault lies in not knowing when to stop, nor how to express his ideas without worrying them out to the last detail. The difficulty is just what Johnson expresses in his *Life of Cowley*: "He pursues his thoughts to their last ramifications, and thereby loses the grandeur of generality by trying to give dignity to the little."

The opinions of the first writers who took the matter up after the Dark Ages have value mainly because of their nearness in time and spirit to the days when Roman Literature was a living thing: their basis of judgment is simply the feeling the plays aroused in them when read: and this was affected by the fact that they conceived them as acted. Some, such as Scaliger,<sup>(1)</sup> Bartholomæus Riccius,<sup>(2)</sup> and Lipsius<sup>(3)</sup> (in regard to a

(1) Cf. G. Boissier, *Les Tragédies de Sénèque*, etc. (Paris, 1861.)

(2) In Delrio's *Syntagma Tragædiæ Latinæ*. (Antwerp, 1593.)

(3) He regards *Medea* and *Thebais* as really good. Cf. his preface in Schröder's *Seneca*. (Delphis, 1728.)

limited number) could see little or nothing to criticize, and even placed them above the Greek masterpieces. To others, as Erasmus,<sup>(4)</sup> the grandeur and nobility which had won the admiration of Scaliger seemed only bombast and empty rant, and they deemed them unworthy the author of the *Moral Treatises*. Using Cicero's diction as a norm, they praised or condemned the language as they saw in these plays reflections of the great orator or deviations from his standard.

Among modern writers it may safely be said that there is a preponderating tendency toward destructive criticism. A good deal of this must naturally be based on what the commentator conceives to be the purpose of the plays. The idea of their being written for acting has already been discussed. That they were intended for Nero's ear or Nero's eye is hardly to be considered, except in Seneca's last years, when he may have taken a desperate chance, in the hope of striking the emperor's fancy and not arousing his envy: Nero had a most unpleasant way of destroying writers whom he regarded as superior to himself.

Seneca seems to have used dramatic form as a means of criticizing the extant Greek plays upon the same subjects, at the same time modifying the plots to correspond to the views of his own age.<sup>(5)</sup> The hatred of

(4) Cf. *Prolegomena ad Senecam Philosophum*, in Lemaire. (Paris, 1829.)

(5) Cf. Claes Lindskog, *Studien zum Antiken Drama*. (Lund, 1897.)

tyranny here found a good vehicle for its expression before sympathetic audiences, and the Stoic philosophy fitted well the characters of the heroes and heroines of Greek tragedy as he portrayed them. That there was a desire to make the whole atmosphere Roman is shown by such words as *Quirites* (*Thyestes* 396). It cannot be denied that the Rome of the first century, with its violence and its baseness, is clearly reflected, nor that Seneca's portrayal makes the evil far less attractive than the good.

In view of their difference in purpose, we must be very careful about condemning the Latin plays solely because of their unlikeness to the Greek. In outward form Seneca has closely followed the Athenians: he has five acts and four choruses; and except in the very rarest cases, most of which can be explained away, he allows only three persons to take part in the dialogue at the same time. Moreover, a new speaker is almost invariably announced before he appears, although these are just the things with which he might have dispensed in plays of this sort.

He differs from the Greek in making the development of the plot subordinate, often telling the point of the whole play in the prologue or in one of the first acts, and in conceiving the chorus as so far separate from the rest of the action as to be absent from the stage, in many cases, until its time for speaking. In Seneca the

feeling is more on the surface: the distribution of emphasis is changed, and it is rather the spectacular, coupled with the horrible, that is brought more prominently before us. (When this is overdone, it becomes ridiculous: as in the case where Thyestes hears the children he has eaten cry out within him.) Again, the changed attitude toward the gods, who are no longer superior to everything, makes the motives of men and the course of conduct they adopt in some instances radically different from the Greek.

In language and in metre Seneca may be called a conservative. He does not use a very great variety in his measures, and in those he does adopt the rules laid down by Horace are pretty generally followed.<sup>(6)</sup> His language is pure and elevated, with only the use of a few words distinctly Augustan and of a number drawn from the early dramatists to weaken its claim to being a model for the age.<sup>(7)</sup>

To take the dramatic structure more in detail: the prologue is no longer a recital of events leading up to the beginning of the dramatic action: it is almost a resumé of the whole plot. This helps to preserve Unity of Action, but unfortunately sometimes renders contradictory or superfluous certain subsequent developments.

<sup>(6)</sup> Cf. J. C. F. Bähr, *Geschichte der römischen Literatur*, vol. I., pp. 181–232. (Carlsruhe, 1868.)

<sup>(7)</sup> Cf. B. Schmidt, *Rheinisches Museum*, XVI. 589 sq. Cf. also L. Müller, *Jahrbücher für Philologie*, vol. 89, pp. 409–425.

In *Œdipus*, for example, the hero has doubts and forebodings from the start, and his careful questioning of Teiresias and Creon, later on, is strange.

The chorus Seneca employs mainly to express his own philosophical ideas. It is usually apart from the action, and is often of so general a character that in some cases transfers of whole passages could be made from one play to another without appreciably affecting the plot. It was introduced because it was traditional in dramatic form, and it represents the last Roman effort in lyric poetry: <sup>(8)</sup> many of the choruses are extremely beautiful, as in the first act of *Hercules Furens* on the Break of Day, or in the fourth act of the same play, in the Address to Sleep.

Considering their probable method of presentation and their rhetorical character, the plays would naturally be made up of long passages, descriptions and speeches, between the choruses, with comparatively little dialogue. The long descriptions were in accord with the taste of the time, and gave Seneca a good chance to introduce his moralizing and his philosophy: often, however, the matter is almost grotesquely overdone, as in the *Hercules Furens*, where Hercules fights for his life with Lycus outside the palace while Theseus tells the family all about the wonders of Hades, for a space of two hundred lines. Again this form is used in an effort to

(8) Cf. Gustave Michaut, *Le Génie Latin*. (Paris, 1900.)

accentuate the horrible, as in the *Medea*, where we are told in detail the whole process by which the poison is prepared.

Notwithstanding the preponderance of description, the dialogue is distinctly characteristic, and in most cases brilliant: such a retort as the well-known *Agnosco fratrem* is hard to surpass. But in striving after pointed antitheses Seneca sometimes overdoes the matter: while the regularity of Stoic sentiments often gives the characters a woodenness which is hardly pleasing.

The best criterion by which we may judge the civilization of any time or people is the treatment accorded to its women: and in a lesser degree this is also true of an author. In this as in other respects Seneca represents his age: it was a time when women reckoned their years, not by the number of consuls, but by the number of their husbands: when modesty and refinement of feeling were no longer esteemed: when there were such as Messalina and Agrippina. The noble in woman was minimized in the minds of men, even when it was present in character. Their sufferings were but a means to an end, as we are told of Lucretia and of Virginia in the historians. Even of their death the law says: *Vir non luget uxorem, nullam debet uxori religionem luctus*. (Digest III. vol. II. line 9.)<sup>(9)</sup>

All this affects Seneca's portrayal. His Phædra is no

<sup>(9)</sup> According to Nisard, *Études Morales et Littéraires*, etc. (Paris, 1877.)

more the modest woman, compelled by the gods to a love she shrinks from telling: but her passion becomes the very essence of her being: she envies even her mother Pasiphaë, and glories in it. Medea is more extreme than the Greek in both her love and her hate: during most of the play she will not relinquish her love for Jason, for whom she has sacrificed so much: it only awaits some sign from him to return with all its force: but when her hatred finally gains full possession of her, its fury knows no bounds. Deianira's only emotion almost from the beginning is the most violent jealous hatred against her husband: Polyxena is masculine in her Stoic scorn of death. The delicacy and modesty of Antigone disappear as she argues with her father how far he can be held accountable in marrying his mother: and the idea we have of Andromache's devotion to her son is rudely shaken when she chooses to have him cast from the tower.

Feeling and emotion in Seneca are fixed in their quality: we are not shown a development, but as the story proceeds there is that same element pervading and permeating everything. One form this fixed emotion takes has been named Aggressive Pathos.<sup>(10)</sup> In Medea, in Deianira, it is not pain, quiet suffering, even with plans for revenge, but the *rage* for vengeance. With Phædra it is the passion of love, wild, uncontrolled.

(10) Cf. J. L. Klein, *Geschichte des Dramas*. (Leipzig, 1865.)

---

In Atreus, it is the inconceivable hatred, that regards no punishment too terrible to be visited upon the offending brother. Some critics have even gone so far as to say that these Latin plays have no real feeling at all:<sup>(11)</sup> and it is true that almost everywhere the finer emotions, the delicate play upon the sensibilities, has given place to the coarser and more violent passions.

This exaggeration of passion is paralleled in other extremes of treatment in the plays. Seneca is distinctly sensational, and under the influence of the Spanish spirit this develops into scenes of horror and of cruelty which have seldom been surpassed. The themes he selected from among the great number available all show this tendency. Nothing could be more ghastly than the *Thyestes* or the final scene of the *Medea*. In fact, the desire to out-Herod Herod is sometimes so strong that we cannot feel the picture true to life. That Hippolytus hates women we may easily conceive: but hardly that for that reason he views the death of his mother with indifference. After Medea has killed her children we cannot conceive anything but moral depression to follow, unless she is absolutely insane: her fiendish delight after the act is beyond our understanding. Seneca saw this, and took the only course open to him,

<sup>(11)</sup> Friedrich Jacobs (in *Nachträge zu Sulzer's Allgemeiner Theorie der Schönen Künste*, vol. IV. pp. 332-408.) (Leipzig, 1795.) Augustus William von Schlegel, *A Course of Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature*, translated by John Black. (London, 1846.) (Lecture 15.)



to make her insane in reality. It involves a weakness in the character-drawing, but Seneca may have been impelled to it by the interest the Romans of the time took in the pathology of dementia.

In general, the characters which Seneca draws are characters of his own time, and characters of his own philosophy: it is needless to say that they do not always fit the stories in which they are put. Sprung from a passionate race, and living in a passionate age, he is truest in showing feminine passion: his men have more strength of mind and will than some of the Greek: his few children are old and philosophical for their years. Many of his persons display a tendency to introspection and self-analysis which we do not find in the models: Sir Walter Scott especially has called attention to this element. Spanish pride shows in *Medea superest*. Stoic pride and the Stoic sort of courage make even the weakest men and women strong in the hour of need.

The treatment of the plots, as compared with their prototypes, is sometimes considerably changed, and in some instances it must certainly be said that the change is for the better. One cause of modification with these, as with the characters, is the influence of the times, and another is the difference in the purpose of the prologue, already referred to. In *Hercules Furens*, for example, the double plot of Euripides is avoided by the

opening speech of Juno, in which we are given the reason for Hercules' return home: that the dénouement is thus disclosed is rather a characteristic of these plays, and certainly not so bad in any case as it would be in a Greek play intended for Greek conditions. Further, Seneca chooses to *tell* of Lycus' death, and *show* Hercules' madness: while Euripides in reversing this is far less happy.<sup>(12)</sup> In *Act* III., on the other hand, the Rule of Three Actors operates unfortunately in making Megara silent, when she should be the principal speaker.

In *Phædra* the difference in treatment hinges upon the different conception of the heroine: and we cannot claim that Seneca's picture is as pleasing. *Hercules Cætaus* as contrasted with *The Trachinians* is far inferior. The violent passion of the wife from the start, and the thought of the love-philtre only at the end, after she has heaped all the curses of heaven upon her husband, are not well placed, as in Sophocles. If the robe had accomplished what Deianira supposed it would, Seneca would have been in a difficult position indeed. The last act, too, is superfluous. So in *Ædipus*: the point is given in the prologue, and the action is finished in two acts: which contrasts sadly with the terrible and slow development in Sophocles. Yet it is

<sup>(12)</sup> Cf. G. E. Lessing, *Sämtliche Schriften*: Lachmann-Muncker: vol. VI. pp. 167-242 incl. (Stuttgart, 1890.)

just this tendency toward separate pictures which characterizes the whole body of Seneca's plays. In *Troades* the scene between Ulysses and Andromache is certainly excellent, and surpasses anything in the Greek models. Dryden, in his work on Dramatic Poetry, gives it unstinted praise, comparing it favorably even with Shakspeare. Everywhere its beauty has attracted no less admiration than has its marked superiority to the rest of the play occasioned surprise. The silence of Polyxena in *Act IV.* is a blemish, again caused by the Rule of Three Actors.

The *Medea*, generally regarded as the finest Latin tragedy extant, must be compared with Euripides' *Medea*, the best of his plays. The plot is of course affected by the difference in character shown in the heroine. The Greek Medea hates from the start, and shows a consistent, unvarying purpose. The Latin Medea still loves, and is ready to take Jason back, but when her hatred gains full mastery she is no longer a woman, but a fiend. In this the Greek character appears stronger than the Roman. Seneca's idea in describing the preparation of the poison rather than its effect is superior to the plan of Euripides: he has the advantage of appeal to the imagination. It is more natural to have the chorus, composed of Corinthians, favorable to Creon and Jason, as in Seneca, than to Medea, as in the Greek. The baseness of Jason, en-

---

tirely unrelieved in Euripides, accentuates best the fury of a sane Medea: the element of manliness in the Latin Jason fits better with a mad one. Seneca has shown Jason's love for his children several times before Medea seizes upon it as the means for her revenge: in the Greek his indifference to them continues during all the first part of the action. The greatness of Euripides' play lies in the consistent development of the heroine's plan for vengeance: in the Latin the almost even balance of the two opposite emotions, love and hate, in the character of Medea, keeps the audience in doubt till near the end as to which will triumph. Taking the two plays as a whole, their points of superiority offset each other so evenly that it is almost impossible to choose either as better than the other. Seneca has here found the level of his model.<sup>(13)</sup>

(13) Among interesting discussions of this whole matter may be mentioned Lessing, l. c.; Ranke, *Die Tragödien Seneca's* (Leipzig, 1888); Widal, *Études sur trois Tragédies de Sénèque*, etc. (Paris, 1854); who are all favorable to Seneca: Jacobs, l. c.; Nisard, l. c.; Sandström, *De L. Annaei Senecae Tragædiis Commentatio* (Upsaliæ, 1872); who are on the other hand unfavorably critical: and Klein, l. c., who takes a middle ground.

## VII

### The Manuscripts of Seneca's Tragedies

In a previous chapter <sup>(1)</sup> it has been shown that the nine tragedies commonly attributed to Seneca are in all probability genuine. In a subsequent chapter arguments will be presented to prove that the *Octavia*, although doubtless not by the same author, was yet in existence not long after the Flavian emperors began to rule in Rome. If we may assume this now, for the sake of argument, it will be interesting to trace the history of the poems down to the present day.

As the writings of a most learned and cultivated man, copies of the nine were naturally in many a gentleman's library during the latter part of the first century; and just before the beginning of the second, Quintilian made use of a text not much different from the original in form. <sup>(2)</sup> It is hardly later than 200 A.D., when already the interest in such matters had begun to grow cold, that the parent text of all we possess must have come into being. This is as late as new copies, or at least this particular copy, can have continued to be fairly free from error. <sup>(3)</sup>

<sup>(1)</sup> Chapter III.

<sup>(2)</sup> Quintilian IX. ii. 8 quotes verse 453 of *Medea*, and he is too early to have had a text much corrupted.

<sup>(3)</sup> Faults common to the two great families of later MSS. point to a corrupted original, and we must allow time for such corruption.

By the end of the third century, whatever represented this parent text had become possessed of numerous faults—faults which appear consistently in all the versions that we have to-day.<sup>(4)</sup> Some time later,—probably toward the end of the fourth century,—a scribe whose estimate of his ability far exceeded his actual scholarship<sup>(5)</sup> took it upon himself to set right the plays of Seneca. He therefore wrote them over again, making such changes as his fancy or his fancied knowledge suggested, and laying the foundation for endless labors by the scholars of later times. In his enthusiasm he took a tenth play, which from its title and its character suggested Seneca very strongly, and which was not very far from the others in date of authorship: this he added, and possibly with the idea that he might thus remove all doubt as to its genuineness, he put it ninth in his list.<sup>(6)</sup> Such was the beginning of what is now known as Recensio A, used by Lactantius Placidus,<sup>(7)</sup> and perhaps by Priscian<sup>(8)</sup> and

(4) See the arguments of F. G. Paullus Habrucker, in *Quæstionum Annæanarum Capita IV.* (Regimonti Prussorum, 1873.)

(5) He is characterized by B. Schmidt in *Jahrbücher für Philologie* 97, as a man “von geringen fähigkeit und kenntnissen verräth.”

(6) See F. Ladek, *De Octavia Prætexta*, in *Diss. Philol. Vindobon.* vol. III., (Vienna, 1891,) and his references to Guil. Braun, *Die Tragödie Octavia und die Zeit ihrer Entstehung* (Kiel, 1863).

(7) Lactantius on *Stat. Theb.* IV. 530 quotes *Tbyestes* 342–352, and in verse 347 uses *trabes*, the reading of A, not *fores*, the reading of E. See Leo's edition of the tragedies (Berlin, 1879), vol. 2, p. 250, and Peiper & Richter's edition (Leipzig, 1902), in Peiper's list of ancient citations.

(8) Priscian *Inst.* VI. 68 quotes *Pbædra* 710, and has *facis* or *facias*, as against *facies* in E. See again Leo and Peiper & Richter.

Boethius;<sup>(9)</sup> and though no longer in existence, represented by the great majority of MSS. which we still possess.<sup>(10)</sup>

The unchanged version, however, did not perish, but continued to be copied carefully, gathering some errors on its way, but still remaining fairly free from the faults of the interpolated text.<sup>(11)</sup> One copy had a peculiar experience, which has saved it to this day—the oldest MS. of Seneca's tragedies still in existence. It was written in the fifth century, and shows in a few places the influence of Recensio A.<sup>(12)</sup> Its preservation came to pass in this way. About the eighth century a certain writer wished to copy the Books of the Kings, and used for this purpose a MS. of the plays of Plautus, which he erased. Some time after, this copy of the Kings was restored, letters being written over again where they were indistinct, and eight new pages being

(9) Rudolf Peiper, in his supplement to the preface of Peiper & Richter's edition of the tragedies (Wratislaviæ, 1870), p. 35, cites Boethius, *Consolatio* I. i. 3, and *Octavia* 338 sqq., to show that Boethius knew *Octavia* and hence MS. A. The dates of these writers (Lactantius 390–430, Priscian about 500, Boethius d. 525) fix the latest time at which A can have been written.

(10) See Ladek, Leo, Pais, *Il Teatro di L. Anneo Seneca* (Torino, 1890), and others. Peiper & Richter divide the descendants of A into three classes, those before the Renaissance in Italy, the later Italian, and those based on the Aldine edition of 1517.

(11) Aldhelm, for example, writing in the seventh century, shows *domus* in *Agamemnon* 729, thus following E against the *domos* of A. But see remark in the text on Aldhelm's version. It would seem that A was by far the most used during the Dark Ages.

(12) Studemund in Leo, vol. 2, speaks of R as nearer E than A, and G. Richter *De corruptis quibusdam Senecæ Tragædiarum Locis*, in *Symbola doctorum Jenensis gymnasii in honorem gymnasii Isenacensi collecta* (Jenæ, 1894), says A may be better than E where it agrees with R against E.

substituted for some of the old ones which were too much worn to be of further use. Five of these pages belonged to this fifth century MS. of Seneca, and thus parts of the *Medea* and *Œdipus* have been preserved to us. The copy is in the Ambrosian Library at Milan, marked G 82 sup.<sup>(13)</sup>

In the seventh century, Aldhelmus mentions Seneca's plays, and refers to the *Agamemnon* as sixth in order.<sup>(14)</sup> If we compare this statement with some made by Vincent de Beauvais in the thirteenth century,<sup>(15)</sup> we find it highly probable that these two men used MSS. practically alike, that they contained *Octavia*, and that they were of the class of Recensio A. This is shown, despite their variation from A in the order of the plays, by the use of the titles *Thebais* and *Hippolytus* for *Phænissæ* and *Phædra*.

Dating from the ninth or tenth century we have Parisinus 8071 Thuanus, valuable because of its age,

(13) Otherwise styled *Fragmenta Rescripta Ambrosiana*, and spoken of as R. See letter of G. Studemund, in Leo, vol. 2.

(14) Sancti Aldhelmi *De Septenario et de Re Grammatica ad Metricam an Acircium Regem* (in *Classicorum Auctorum e Vaticanis codicibus editorum Tomus V* curante Angelo Maio [Romæ, 1833]). "Sic eadem -d- littera in -t- transmutatur, ut Lucius Anneus Seneca in sexto volumine tetrametro brachycatalecto sic ait:" then follow two quotations from the *Agamemnon*.

(15) In *Speculum Historiale* Vincentii Bellovacensis, of Seneca, cap. CII: "(scripsit) tragœdias quoque decem"; in cap. CXIII he quotes from four tragedies, in this order: *Troades*, *Ciephe* (*Thyestes*), *Octavia*, *Hercules Esbeos*; and in cap. CXIII from the other six: *Hercules Furens*, *Thebais*, *Hypolitus*, *Edippus*, *Medea*, *Agamemnon*. In cap. LIX he says "hunc Herculem Seneca vocat Etœum: de quo est ultima tragœdiarum ejus," etc. From this we infer that the two lists should be interchanged in order: this would bring *Agamemnon* sixth, where Aldhelmus says it is.



and containing fragments of *Troades*, *Medea*, and *Œdipus*.<sup>(16)</sup> But it remained for the eleventh or twelfth century to produce the version<sup>(17)</sup> which is regarded as the best extant, and which doubtless is not much different from the work upon which the interpolator of A based his copy. It lacks the *Octavia*, and in this differs from all the descendants of A. From it came a MS. which has been named Z, and which, though lost, was the parent of M and N, two copies which have *Octavia* at the end, and are our best sources for that play.<sup>(18)</sup> This completes the list of important versions previous to the Revival of Learning and the invention of the art of printing. Except for the Ambrosian Palimpsest, the Codex Thuaneus, and the Etruscus, no MSS. antedate the middle of the fourteenth century; and none of these three contains the *Octavia*.<sup>(19)</sup>

The early commentators of the Renaissance had to

<sup>(16)</sup> See reference and readings in Leo.

<sup>(17)</sup> Now known as *Laurentianus* 37. 6. Its title *M. Annæi Senecæ*, etc., is clearly a mistake, but has made much trouble for scholars. See G. Richter, *De Seneca Tragædiarum Auctore*. (Bonn, 1862.)

<sup>(18)</sup> Leo's view, as he scouts A and its kind as utterly untrustworthy. *Octavia's* being at the end may indicate that it was copied from a MS. of the A class, which showed the copyist of Z ten plays when he had only nine. The scribe responsible for N (*Vaticanus* 1769) has written the caption "*Marcj luti annæi senecæ tragedie novem*," and then given a list of ten names.

<sup>(19)</sup> See G. Richter in *Jahrbücher für Philologie*, vol. 95 (Leipzig, 1867), pp. 260-264, and Ladek. A MS. at Florence, dated 1368, is among the oldest of the A family, if we exclude one at Leyden on which the date is 1340: after the third C in this MS. there are signs of erasure, as if the date had originally been 1440.

rely upon very poor texts.<sup>(20)</sup> The editio princeps was published at Ferrara about 1484,<sup>(21)</sup> and the Aldine Edition, by Hieronymus Avantius, came out in 1517.<sup>(22)</sup> This was based upon the descendants of Recensio A, which at that time was the sole source for the text. Lipsius, using an excellent MS. given him by Paulus Melissus, edited the plays in 1588, but he was afraid to make much use of that MS.,<sup>(23)</sup> as it differed so much from the other versions then known. It appears to have been similar to z. Scaliger brought out another edition in 1611.

It was Johannes Fridericus Gronovius, however, in 1640, who had the honor of discovering the twelfth century MS., in the Laurentian Library at Florence, which was to restore the true reading in so many places where the interpolated text had been substituted for the original form. He named his find *Etruscus*, and it has since been known as E.<sup>(24)</sup> The editions of this are dated 1661 and 1682.

Since that time the most important discovery has been that of Codex R. Early in the nineteenth century Angelo Mai took the pages containing Seneca

(20) See Habruker. Even Lipsius in 1588 feared to use his good text, it was so different from the others.

(21) Habruker, and Pais.

(22) Peiper & Richter.

(23) See prefaces of Gronovius and Lipsius in *L. Annæi Senecæ Tragædiæ*, etc., by Joannes Casparus Schröderus. (Delphis, MDCCXXVIII.)

(24) See preface of Gronovius, *supra cit.*

from the context and numbered them, and later Friedrich Ritschl made some hasty excerpts from them.<sup>(25)</sup> In the recent editions of the plays it has been valuable in substantiating some readings where other versions were not satisfactory.

There have been many editions of the Tragedies, a partial list of which will be found in Pais. The two which represent the latest thought on the whole subject are those of Leo (Berlin, 1879), and of Peiper & Richter (Leipzig, 1902).

<sup>(25)</sup> See again Studemund's letter in Leo's edition.

## VIII

### The Authorship of *Octavia Prætexta* from Early Times Associated with Seneca's Tragedies

Since the time of Lipsius,<sup>(1)</sup> when the claim that Seneca wrote all ten plays ascribed to him was first disputed, the *Octavia* has been without an author. There have been attempts almost without number to bring positive proof both as to the author and the date, but the most that has resulted has been to produce a fairly plausible theory. In the previous chapter the notion has been advanced that the *Octavia* became a part of the body of Seneca's tragedies at the time of the revision which resulted in Recensio A. It will be interesting to consider reasons which may have been responsible for its adoption.

The resemblance in style, in habits of thought, between the *prætexta* and the plays has been noticed by more than one commentator.<sup>(2)</sup> This is perhaps

(1) Cf. Lipsius in Schröder, l. c. (Delphis, 1728), *Puer ego sum, nisi a puero ea scripta: certe pueri modo.*

(2) Cf. F. Ladek, *De Octavia Prætexta*, in *Diss. Philol. Vindobon.* (Vienna, 1891), and L. von Ranke, *Abhandlungen und Versuche*, p. 59 sqq. (Leipzig, 1888). Ladek exemplifies this by a list of several pages.

most apparent in the *Troades*, whose opening lines are especially similar to those of the *Octavia*, while the finale again brings the *prætexta* clearly before the mind.

Seneca's casts of characters are remarkable for the presence of a ghost in so many of the plays: and the *Octavia* shows this tendency to a marked degree.<sup>(3)</sup> The same fondness for proverbial expressions,<sup>(4)</sup> the same rhetorical manner,<sup>(5)</sup> and the same philosophical spirit,<sup>(4)</sup> are everywhere visible: and if in varying degree, the fact is in corroboration of Seneca's authorship, rather than the reverse.<sup>(6)</sup>

What can be said in regard to the plays is almost equally true in respect to the prose writings. A Stoic element is apparent in the attitude toward rulers and high power.<sup>(7)</sup> The dispute between Seneca and Nero clearly points to *De Clementia* I.<sup>(8)</sup> The whole devel-

(3) Cf. Ghost of Tantalus in *Thyestes*: Ghost of Thyestes in *Agamemnon*: Ghost of Laius in *Œdipus*: Ghosts of Achilles and Hector in *Troades*: in *Octavia* Ghost of Agrippina and Ghostly Dreams of Octavia and of Poppæa.

(4) Cf. e. g. the dialogue between Seneca and Nero.

(5) Cf. R. M. Smith, *De Arte Rhetorica*, etc. (Leipzig, 1885), and Ladek.

(6) A mere copyist would have followed his model closely, while the same author, or, as is probably here the case, another who had become thoroughly imbued with the spirit of his master, would show less resemblance in detail, and more in a general way.

(7) Cf. verse 471, *quidquid excelsum est cadat*.

Verse 897, *quatiunt altas sæpe procellæ  
aut evertit Fortuna domos*.

(8) Cf. verse 488, *generis humani arbiter electus* and *De Clementia* I. i. 2, *egone ex omnibus mortalibus . . . electus sum, qui in terris deorum vice fungerer? ego vitæ necisque arbiter?* etc.

opment of the plot shows the destructive power of Fate, pursuing one after another the members of a family it has doomed.<sup>(9)</sup>

In the matter of metrical structure there are important differences between the *Octavia* and the other plays, although not so great as some writers aver. The prosody is simple, consisting of iambic trimeter in the dialogues and speeches, and of anapæstic measures<sup>(10)</sup> in the choruses. These latter, indeed, do show a freer use of hiatus and *syllaba anceps*; but this one point contains all the force of the argument on metrical grounds against Seneca's authorship, as there is just one word<sup>(11)</sup> where the quantity deviates from the usage of the other plays.

In word-use generally, the critics have selected certain forms which they proclaim as peculiar to *Octavia*,<sup>(12)</sup> such as *mox* with the force of *deinde* (eight times), or as lacking in the *prætexta*, as *at*, *retro*, adjectives in *-ficus* and *-fer*. Such arguments, however, cannot have very much weight, especially when we remember that the MSS. are far from good. The double chorus is char-

(9) This was especially true in its application to the House of Claudius, thus completely annihilated, and the fact contributed perhaps more than anything else to the hatred in which the memory of Nero was held soon after his death.

(10) The great number of monometers is to be observed: in fact, there is one theory that all the anapæsts must be written in monometers. Cf. Richter, *De Seneca Tragædiarum Auctore*. (Bonn, 1862.)

(11) This word is *modò* (verse 273), but in other plays Seneca wavers between *sērō* and *sērò*; between *sūbitò* and *sūbitū*.

(12) Gustavus Richter, *De Seneca Tragædiarum Auctore*. (Bonn, 1862.)

acteristic not only of *Octavia* but of Seneca's *Agamemnon* and *Hercules Œtaeus*. The rule of Horace,<sup>(13)</sup> *Ne quarta loqui persona laboret*, otherwise observed by Seneca,<sup>(14)</sup> is followed in *Octavia*, e. g. I. Nero II. Octavia, Poppæa, Seneca III. Octavia's Nurse, Poppæa's Nurse, Shade of Agrippina, Prefect, Messenger.<sup>(15)</sup>

The quality of the play has been variously estimated, opinions ranging all the way from Lipsius' utter condemnation<sup>(16)</sup> to the praise of Vater,<sup>(17)</sup> who says it is the best extant example of the Roman Tragedy. The subject itself is dramatic in the extreme, and there is a realistic quality in the portrayal, at least of some of the characters, which raises the poem above the common level.<sup>(18)</sup>

The picture of Nero, the cruel tyrant, is exceptionally vivid. The author seems to have done his utmost to show him as the greatest monster of antiquity, even representing some of his satellites in lighter colors to heighten the effect.<sup>(19)</sup> His first words are a command to kill: the whole plot shows his determination to be

(13) *De Arte Poetica*, 192.

(14) Henri Weil, in *Revue Arch.* 1865, I. p. 21 sqq.

(15) Ladek's arrangement. Cf. however, against this, Richter in Teubner edition.

(16) Cf. Lipsius in Schröder: *Imo verbera eruditorum excipienda, non plausu.*

(17) Cf. F. Vater, in Jahn's *Archiv für Philologie und Pädagogik*, vol. 19, pp. 565-618. (Leipzig, 1853.)

(18) This realistic element is a strong argument for giving the play an early date.

(19) The cruel Tigellinus advising Nero to be merciful can only be interpreted in this way.

absolute master, disregarding altogether Seneca's warnings, and deciding finally upon Octavia's destruction because the people are in her favor.<sup>(20)</sup> Octavia is represented as pure and innocent, unable until the last to realize the full import of Nero's cruelty, and then driven to the conclusion which must have forced itself upon most of the people toward the end of Nero's reign: that the emperor and the powers of evil ruled the world, and the gods above no longer cared to guide the destinies of men. The contrast between the character of Nero and that of Octavia is further heightened by the omission of all mention of her alleged intercourse with Anicetus, and her consequent banishment to Campania. Nothing is spoken of which could tend to cast opprobrium on her name. The whole thing suggests clearly a time of civil discord and distress; and one who had not witnessed those days could hardly have been its author.<sup>(21)</sup>

Other characteristics, also, point, if not to Seneca, yet to an author close to the times of Nero—an author who may have been Seneca and may have been one of his contemporaries. The reference to Britain in the beginning of the play (verse 27) testifies to the pride the Romans felt, at that time most keenly, in the

(20) Cf. Nero's dialogue with the *Præfectus*, and his soliloquy preceding.

(21) Cf. e. g. Karl Meiser. *Über historische Dramen der Römer*. (München, 1887.) Levée et Le Monnier, *Théâtre Complet des Latins*, etc., vol. 14. (Paris, 1820–1823.)



recent conquest of Britain by Claudius.<sup>(22)</sup> The author speaks of the Comet (verse 232), which appeared in 60 A. D., at the institution of the Quinquennalia, and was regarded as a sign that a new emperor was to take the reins of government.<sup>(23)</sup> There is a significant likeness to contemporary writers in particular expressions. Hosius in particular says a comparison of *Octavia* with Lucan's *Pharsalia* shows that the author of the play was familiar with the earlier books of the poem, but not with the last: as this was all well known by the time of Vespasian it points to an early date for the *Octavia*.<sup>(24)</sup> All these facts, to be sure, indicate Seneca's authorship only in a general way, and the last commentator<sup>(25)</sup> who makes this a distinct claim contents himself in the end with saying that the burden of proof rests with the other side.

The case of the opposition is more definite, and rests upon several specific points. First of all is a fact which has been adduced as one possible reason for the original inclusion of the *prætexta* with the other nine; the appearance of Seneca himself among the *dramatis per-*

(22) Cf. F. Bücheler, *Coniectanea*, in *Rhein. Mus.* 27: 474. Gustavus Nordmeyer, *De Octaviæ Fabulæ Fontibus Historicis*, pp. 94-108 in *Schedæ Philologæ Hermannæ Usener Oblatæ*. (Bonn, 1891.)

(23) Cf. Tacitus, *Annals*, XIV. 22. The value of this point lies in the fact that the significance of this appearance was regarded as important only then, and would hardly have suggested itself to one writing in much later times.

(24) Carl Hosius, *Lucanus und Seneca*, in *Jahrbücher für Philologie*, 145, pp. 350-354.

(25) J. G. C. Klotzsch, in the Collection of N. E. Lemaire. (Paris, 1829.)

sonæ. It is of course hardly likely that Seneca would represent himself in such a way, if for no other reason, simply because there is no purpose thus to be served. Nero was beyond receiving such a production as an admonition, and Seneca would never have ventured to publish it to satisfy his own animosity: he feared then too much for his own life.<sup>(26)</sup> Further, he would hardly have attributed to himself the fault with which he is charged in Act IV., unless, as one writer ingeniously explains, *culpa Senecæ* means "in spite of the objections of Seneca."<sup>(27)</sup>

Seneca died three years before Nero, yet in verses 619 sqq., and again in verse 733, the manner of the latter's death is described. It is not beyond reason, however, to suppose that the author, knowing as well as he did the character of Nero, foresaw just such an end as really befell him. To be utterly abandoned and at last to fall into the power of his enemies was what he might naturally expect; and at the last to have his neck fastened and his naked body beaten with rods until he died was at least *more majorum* for a man declared a public enemy, and so again in the direct line of reasonable prediction.

<sup>(26)</sup> But, on the other hand, Seneca was already responsible for one work, the *Apocolocyntosis*, written to show his feeling on the death of Claudius: possibly this was a second attempt in a similar direction.

<sup>(27)</sup> Cf. Watson Bradshaw, M.D., *The Ten Tragedies of Seneca* (translated). (London, 1902.) Leo avoids the difficulty by substituting *contempta* for *culpa*.

It is remarkable that the deaths of Poppæa, Crispinus and his son, and Nero, should be referred to in the order in which they occurred, and all of them in a play written previous to the events.<sup>(28)</sup> The reference to Vindex (verse 255) is important, if, as seems probable, it refers to the general in Spain to whose lack of allegiance Nero owed his overthrow. Seneca could hardly have foreseen that, and the use of the word in other authors to point to the same thing makes it probably so used in *Octavia*.<sup>(29)</sup>

The failure of the author of the *Octavia* to observe the Unities of Time and of Place is noticeable, but, as has been previously shown (Chapter II.), the Greeks were not altogether consistent in this matter, nor is Seneca himself in *Hercules Œtæus* and in *Thyestes*. These points, taken singly, are of course not conclusive, but taken together they seem to justify the question of Pontanus, *Quo modo ab ipso nisi Apolline aliquo pleno perscribi potuerunt?*<sup>(30)</sup>

<sup>(28)</sup> Cf. verses 724 sqq. It is clear that verse 733 refers to Nero's death. Compare also the sequence of events as recounted in Suetonius, *Nero*, and in Tacitus, *Annals*, XVI.

<sup>(29)</sup> Cf. Vater, *supra cit.* in note 17 of this chapter. But *Phædra* 261, *Hercules Furens* 385, and *Medea* 173 also suggest most strongly the same idea.

<sup>(30)</sup> In Schröder, *sup. cit.*

## IX

### The Date of Octavia Prætexta

The latest date to which anyone has ventured to assign the *Octavia* is the fourteenth century. Wilhelm Braun<sup>(1)</sup> declares that no tragedy was written between the time of Tacitus' *Annals*, upon which he says *Octavia* is based, and the twelfth century: that the form follows the *Troades* of Seneca, as Albertinus Mussatus (1260-circa 1330) followed the same author in *Achilleis*: and that, in view of the fact that Seneca was much studied in the fourteenth century, a plausible theory is that the *Octavia* was written by Thomas Seneca Camertinus, who lived at Ancona under Cosmo di Medici in 1420.<sup>(2)</sup>

Braun's idea has been assailed on every side from the time of its promulgation, and is certainly untenable. There is a genuine MS. dating as early as 1376 (Neapolitanus D 47), which contains the *Octavia*: the revival of the study of Seneca's tragedies in the Middle

(1) *Die Tragödie Octavia und die Zeit ihrer Entstehung*. (Kiel, 1863.) (I have been unable to secure this work, and so to get its statements at first hand.)

(2) Cf. Ladek on this, and Richter, *Jahrbücher für Philologie* (Lipsitz, 1867), vol. 95, pp. 260-264.

Ages is due to Mussatus and Trevethus (d. 1327), and they appear to have known *Octavia*: the poem is mentioned in a list of ten attributed to Seneca by Vincent de Beauvais,<sup>(3)</sup> and by Ricardus de Fournival,<sup>(4)</sup> both of whom lived in the middle of the thirteenth century. Earlier than this and subsequent to the Dark Ages there is no trace of dramatic production: to say nothing of the fact that the *Octavia* must have had time to undergo extensive corruption before it reached the state in which we now possess it.<sup>(5)</sup>

Passing by the evidence already mentioned in Chapter VII. to show that the *Octavia* was known to Aldhelmus in the seventh century, and to Boethius at the beginning of the sixth, we come to the body of discussion which connects its production with the date when Recensio A came into being. This is presumably as early as the latter part of the fourth century. It has been suggested<sup>(6)</sup> that the scribe who made Recensio A made also the prætecta, but from his mistakes and generally unscholarly character that seems impossible.<sup>(7)</sup> We have no knowledge of such poems in the fourth

(3) *Speculum Historiale*, p. 98, and p. 103. In the former place quotations from *Octavia* are given.

(4) Cf. Peiper in *L. Annæi Senecæ Tragædiæ*, Peiper & Richter. (Lipsiæ, 1902.)

(5) Cf. Richter and Ladek, l. c., for statements of Braun's case and the reasons against its validity.

(6) Cf. Richter, l. c.

(7) B. Schmidt, *Jahrbücher für Philologie* 97: *Anz. v. Senecæ Tragædiæ* edd. R. Peiper et G. Richter.

century: the idea that the metre puts it after *Hercules Œtæus*, and that that must mean after the second century, is discredited as soon as we accept *Hercules Œtæus* as written by Seneca.<sup>(8)</sup>

All that remains is the argument based on the use of Tacitus, who was studied in the fourth century,<sup>(9)</sup> and who is one of our most important historical authorities on the period with which the *prætexta* deals. We cannot deny that there is great similarity between the stories as told by Tacitus and by the author of the *prætexta*: but both writers apparently knew their subject, and it is certainly conceivable that the historian may have drawn upon the dramatist for material.<sup>(10)</sup> Such things were undoubtedly done, as is apparent in many of the dramatic pictures presented by Livy: and Tacitus, if he drew upon an inferior poem, even admitting the *Octavia* to be such, would have regarded the matter simply: the form would not have deterred him. Our material on the history of Nero's

(8) Cf. Chapter III., on the authorship of *Hercules Œtæus*.

(9) The frequent references to him and quotations from his works in Orosius, for example, show this.

(10) Franz Ritter, *Octavia Prætexta Curatio Materno Vindicata* (Bonn, 1843) brings proof of this. (References to this book also must unfortunately be at second hand.) It is further apropos at this point to mention the verses appearing in Tacitus, *Annals*, XIV. 8, and taken verbatim from the *prætexta*. Although they are generally regarded as spurious, their very presence shows that someone thought of Tacitus as the copyist. Cf. Vater, in *Jahn's Archiv*, vol. 19 (Leipzig, 1853), pp. 565-618. Cf. further Maximilian Zimmerman, *De Tacito Senecæ Philosophi Imitatore*. (Vratislaviæ, 1889.) He regards the influence of Seneca, especially in his letters, as all-pervading in Tacitus: the descriptive coloring in particular shows this.

reign, written before the time of Tacitus, is scanty at best.

The validity of their arguments who claim Tacitus as the source may best be tested by a consideration of separate facts in history, as shown in the *Octavia* on the one hand, and in Tacitus and other writers on the other.

I. Verses 155 sqq. contain a reference to L. Junius Silanus, but the latter part of the sentence appears to refer to his father Appius.<sup>(11)</sup> If, however, this can be explained away by referring *thalamis* to a time and not a place, a figurative use, we have a strong proof that the author knew his times well, for *patrios* may easily refer to the fact that L. Silanus was *abnepos* of Augustus.

II. In verse 164 *Octavia* says *conjunx* (i. e. Agrippina) poisoned Claudius: Suetonius says *conjunx* or a taster: Tacitus says a taster: while Dio<sup>(12)</sup> and Pliny<sup>(13)</sup> agree with the *prætexta*.<sup>(14)</sup>

III. Verses 183 sqq. There is no reference here to the account in Tacitus,<sup>(15)</sup> where Poppæa beseeches Nero to favor her and destroy the people. Meiser's words are very emphatic on this point: "Kein drama-

(11) Cf. Suetonius, *Claudius*, 37. The Silanus reference is used by some commentators to show that the author confused father and son, and therefore was not familiar with his subject.

(12) LX. 34.

(13) *Naturalis Historia*, XXII. 92.

(14) The tendency of this is rather to discredit Tacitus and justify the play.

(15) *Annals*, XIV. 61. Cf. Ritter, p. VIII., and Karl Meiser, *Über historische Dramen der Römer*. (München, 1887.)

tischer Dichter, and wäre er der grösste Stümper, der die meisterhafte Charakteristik bei Tacitus gelesen, . . . konnte dieses wirksame Motiv so unbeachtet lassen."

IV. Verses 193 sqq. The mention of Acte's monument is found in *Octavia* alone, the historians making no reference to it. It has been suggested that this was a sepulchral monument, erected by Acte when she was in imminent fear of death at the hands of Nero.<sup>(16)</sup> Inscriptions, however, referring to the freedwoman of Nero, are not extant, with the possible exception of one, *C. I. L. XI. 1414*, (CE)RERI·SACRVM·AVG·LIB·ACTE.<sup>(17)</sup> In view of the fact that Ceres was supposed to have control in matters of divorce,<sup>(18)</sup> this may perhaps record a prayer of Acte's, that her fear of Nero's casting her off may prove groundless. The whole matter is against a late date for the *prætexta*, as the sources for a writer long after the events would almost without question be purely literary, while only one familiar with the times and living in them would know of a matter of so little real importance.

V. The references to Agrippina are not at all consistent in our various sources. Tacitus is fuller in his description, perhaps because he desires to include all possible testimony on the subject. His mention of the

(16) Vater, l. c.

(17) Cf. F. Henricus Norisius, *Cenotaphia Pisana Caii et Lucii Caesarum*. (Venice, 1681.) *Dissertatio III.*, chapter 2, page 363.

(18) Servius on *Æneid* III. 139.



wreck of the cabin on the boat which was intended to bear Agrippina to her death does not occur in the *prætexta*. In the account of the shipwreck itself he agrees with Suetonius, but not with *Octavia* or Dio. *Octavia* says the ship went to pieces: Tacitus says it was borne down on one side. The description of the wounding of Agrippina, and of her last words, too, are not the same in *Octavia* as in Tacitus; nor does *Octavia* speak of Nero's examining the dead body of his mother.<sup>(19)</sup> The mention of her monuments, and the testimony that they were destroyed (*Octavia* 611) does not appear at all in Tacitus.

VI. Verses 619–631. The account of the manner of Nero's death, herein described, is entirely lacking in Tacitus: the story agrees very well with Suetonius, but no one has undertaken to claim Suetonius as the source of the *prætexta*.

VII. Again, in speaking of the burning of Rome, Tacitus alone suggests that it may have happened by chance, and refers it to Nero's desire to build a new city for his own glory. Neither *Octavia* nor the historians aside from Tacitus show any doubt that Nero set the fire, and *Octavia* (verse 831) ascribes it to the excitement about the fate of the princess. But in view of the fact that Tacitus gives value to everybody's opin-

<sup>(19)</sup> See Gustavus Nordmeyer, *De Octaviæ Fabulæ Fontibus Historicis*, pp. 94–108, in *Schedæ Philologæ Hermannæ Usener Oblatæ* (Bonnæ, 1891), for a table of discrepancies between *Octavia* and Tacitus on this subject.

ions, and that in *Octavia* the fate of the heroine is really the main concern of the play and her influence is given at least as much weight as it has a right to, the discrepancy here is only natural.

VIII. In verse 844 the appeal to mercy of the prefect does not at all agree with Tacitus' characterization of Tigellinus. It seems likely that the author of the *Octavia* made Nero's minister appear lenient in order to heighten the contrast with the character of his master. The idea that this is a reference to Fænius Rufus is hardly tenable when we compare this passage in the play with the account in Tacitus.<sup>(20)</sup>

IX. Verses 925-946. The mention of Julia, and the way in which she was put to death, is an important point in determining the trustworthiness of the *Octavia* and the value of the information it contains. There were two Julias put to death by Claudius at the instigation of Messalina: Julia the daughter of Germanicus and Agrippina, and Julia the daughter of Drusus and Livia.<sup>(21)</sup> Seneca (*Apocolocyntosis* X.) informs us that one perished of starvation, the other by the sword, but does not say which. From Suetonius<sup>(22)</sup> we learn that the daughter of Germanicus was notoriously immoral. From Tacitus<sup>(23)</sup> we learn that the other Julia told her

<sup>(20)</sup> *Annals*, XIII. 51.

<sup>(21)</sup> Suetonius, *Claudius* 29.

<sup>(22)</sup> *Caligula* 24. Cf. also scholiast on Juvenal V. 109.

<sup>(23)</sup> *Annals*, IV. 60.

mother all her husband's secrets, to be sure; but this need not be regarded as a crime.<sup>(24)</sup> The position of *matris* in *Octavia* makes it probable that it means Livia, and that her daughter Julia is referred to. The words *crimine nullo* are very strongly against the idea that the reference is to the daughter of Germanicus. The two points taken together virtually prove a fact we have from no other source, namely, that Julia the daughter of Germanicus was starved to death and Julia the daughter of Drusus was killed by the sword. This certainly could not have been drawn from Tacitus, and it shows that the writer lived close to the times which he described.<sup>(25)</sup>

The omission in the play of everything tending to discredit the character of Octavia has already been noted. There are places in the *Octavia* which agree much better with Dio than with Tacitus, as the description of the shipwreck,<sup>(26)</sup> but no one has ever claimed

(24) Cf. Nipperdey, note on Tacitus' *Annals*.

(25) Vater has tried to show from Tacitus, *Annals*, XIV. 63, that the historian is the source: but the Julia here referred to is the daughter of Germanicus, as is shown by the words *a Claudio pulsæ*. Tacitus speaks of the daughter of Germanicus in this connection *because* she and Octavia were both exiled: if the *Octavia* had been taken from Tacitus it would naturally mention the same one. There is more than one especial reason why the author of *Octavia* chose as he did: all the other women he mentions died by the sword, he puts Julia the guiltless next to Livia the guilty, and he keeps mother and daughter together without violating the sequence of time. The whole point is made by Bücheler (*Divi Claudii 'Αποκολοκύντωσις*, page 59 of volume I in *Symbola Philologorum Bonnensium* [Leipzig, 1864]), but he does not use *Octavia*, and so can only say that *probably* the daughter of Drusus is meant, as she is the older and the more important.

(26) Cf. again the table in Nordmeyer, already referred to.

that Dio was the source. The character-drawing, too, shows the vividness of Tacitus only in that in *Octavia* also there are vivid characterizations: while a writer using the *Annals* as his source would show resemblances much more specific in this respect. Making all allowances, then, for the differences in purpose between the two works, we can be certain that *Octavia* is not all drawn from Tacitus. It is of course possible that the other facts were drawn from works since lost, but hardly probable: and at so late a date as the fourth century it is out of the question.<sup>(27)</sup> The idea that the play was a product of the activity of students of Tacitus, in that early revival of learning, falls then to the ground: and with it the reasons for assigning the date to the fourth century.

The general consensus of most recent opinion is in favor of a date sometime during the reign of the Flavian Emperors.<sup>(28)</sup> The style and metre do not show sufficient variance from the models of the time to disprove this. The feeling of the times—pride in the conquest of Britain by Claudius; hatred of the Emperor Nero and his memory, coupled with disappointment that the hopes engendered by the earlier years of his

<sup>(27)</sup> All the works before Tacitus which treated of Nero's time quickly perished after his death, except Suetonius (and of course *Octavia*). Cf. Nissen, *Rhein. Mus.* XXVI. p. 498.

<sup>(28)</sup> An imposing array of names may be cited in support of this: F. Bücheler, E. Bährens, A. Stahr, F. Leo, F. Ritter, K. Meiser, C. Hosius, L. Müller, Amaury-Duval.

reign were not realized; regret at the complete destruction of the House of Claudius, and sympathy for the bitter life and premature end of his daughter Octavia; doubt and fear as to the future after the rapid procession of emperors succeeding Nero—all are there. The writing of *prætextæ* flourished in this epoch—certainly in the reign of Domitian. Interest in Seneca and his school persisted only a few years after his death. We learn from Quintilian that by the time he wrote, Seneca was no longer in vogue. The vivid picturing, too, can hardly have been possible except for one who had his facts at first hand: to say nothing of the reference to Acte's monument and to Julia, the daughter of Drusus, for which the *prætextæ* is our only source.

On the assumption that, although the author lived no later than the time of the Flavii, he nevertheless drew upon historical works then extant, an effort has been made to determine who these authorities were.<sup>(29)</sup> The suggestion is made that inasmuch as *Octavia* (verses 100 sqq.) shows a marked similarity to Tacitus, *Annals*, XIV. 63, e. g., and as it has been shown that neither is derived from the other, they must have had a common source. A similar suggestion is made on the basis of a comparison between *Octavia* (verses 333 sqq.) and Josephus, *Antiq. Jud.* XX. viii. 2, where the point is not touched upon either by Tacitus, Suetonius, or

(29) Cf. Nordmeyer, l. c.

Dio. Mommsen<sup>(30)</sup> says Josephus drew from Cluvius. Tacitus also says that he (Tacitus) used Cluvius and Fabius Rusticus; and the latter in some points is known to have favored Seneca, while Tacitus speaks of disagreeing with him. With this the suggestions end: the testimony seems rather based upon a feeling only, that the facts used in the *Octavia* are not drawn from first-hand knowledge; but it would unquestionably be absurd, on the other hand, to claim that the *prætexta* cannot in any part have had a literary source.

The quest of an appropriate author to whom to ascribe the *Octavia* has been almost as unremitting as the investigations in other directions: but with the conclusion that the work was written sometime within the last thirty years of the first century A. D., most of the names suggested must be abandoned. We are told, for example, that C. Cilnius Mæcenas wrote an *Octavia*,<sup>(31)</sup> but the words quoted from his play, and the fact that he died in 8 B. C., show that we must look further.

The general idea of the commentators seems to have been, at least in the earlier times since the Renaissance, to find some name suggested by one or other of the names of Seneca. For example, Delrio<sup>(32)</sup> in 1593 suggests Annæus Statius, who was with Seneca when he

<sup>(30)</sup> *Hermes*, IV., pp. 322 and 324 note.

<sup>(31)</sup> Cf. Priscian, Book X. 47.

<sup>(32)</sup> Martini Antonii Delrii *Syntagma Tragædiæ Latinæ* (Antwerp, 1593), p. 64.

died. Vossius<sup>(33)</sup> in 1697 thinks it is L. Annæus Florus the historian. He was associated with Seneca in many ways by the earlier scholars, and may have been connected with his family. Lactantius quotes *Seneca* as having distinguished the four ages of Rome, and this distinction agrees with the one made by Florus,<sup>(34)</sup> whence some critics conclude that the historian's name was Annæus Seneca Florus, or that he changed it, and was at one time L. Annæus Florus and at another L. Annæus Seneca. Vossius says the style of Florus was rhetorical and almost poetic. But all this furnishes a very slight ground on which to base a claim of authorship, and, furthermore, Florus lived too late, 140 A. D.

There is one author, and one only, so far as we are definitely told, who wrote *prætextæ* at about the time when it is most probable that the *Octavia* was written, and who is agreed upon by more than one critic<sup>(35)</sup> as the man most likely to have composed the play. This author is Curiatius Maternus, who is so prominent a character in Tacitus' *Dialogus de Oratoribus*.<sup>(36)</sup> If we

(33) Gerardi Joannis Vossii, *Tractatus Philologici de Rhetorica*, etc., *Natura ac Constitutione*. (Amstelodami, 1697.) Vol. 3, *De Poetis Latinis*, pp. 246-247, and vol. 4, pp. 52-53.

(34) Cf. Simcox, *A History of Latin Literature*, volume 2, pages 233-235. Sir Edward Sherburne, *The Tragedies of L. Annæus Seneca the Philosopher* (London, 1702), suggests that Lactantius simply had an imperfect copy of the *Epitome*, marked *L. Annæus*, and by mistake added *Seneca* instead of *Florus*.

(35) Franz Ritter, l. c. Adolph Stahr, *Agrippina die Mutter Neros* (Berlin, 1867), p. 272. C. Hosius, *Jahrbücher für Philologie*, 145, anno 1892, p. 354.

(36) Cf. especially Sections 2-4.

identify him with the Maternus mentioned by Dio,<sup>(37)</sup> we have a very tempting array of possibilities. Maternus wrote tragedies, on Greek subjects, under Vespasian, and became so interested that he ventured upon the field of *prætextæ*. His *Cato* produced great excitement in the city, and some of its reflections on tyrants aroused the displeasure of those high in authority. His *Domitius* followed, and this mended matters somewhat, since he represented Nero as a youth of excellent character. Finally, a dozen years later, he produced *Octavia*, and the sentiments contained therein so aroused the Emperor Domitian, suggesting to him as they did his own treatment of his wife Domitia, that he summarily put an end to the author's life.<sup>(38)</sup> This would make a very plausible story, but unfortunately our proof is very insufficient, and we must go back to the statement which is so indefinite that it cannot be controverted: the play was written by an unknown author, and probably in the time of the Flavii.

<sup>(37)</sup> Xiphilinus, LXVII. 12.

<sup>(38)</sup> This is for the most part a rough outline of Ritter's argument, as gathered from its criticism by Vater, l. c.

#### FINIS





## Vita

Exoniæ, in re publica Neo-Hantoniensi, natus sum, ante diem undecimum Kalendas Martias, Anno Domini Nostri millesimo octingentesimo septuagesimo quinto. Pater Iosephus Knowlton Chickering, mater Maria Elisabetha Conner fuit. Primo mense ætatis matre orbatum pater manibus avunculi Caroli Gilman Conner, summa humanitate benevolentiaque viri, me tradidit. Ad annum tertium decimum meum in scholis publicis Exoniæ elementa discebam. Hoc anno in Academiam Phillipsiam Exoniensem introductus sum, a qua post quattuor annos, septiens interim in honoratis numeratus, diploma accepi. Iis temporibus pater fuit linguæ et litterarum Anglicarum professor in Universitate Viridimontana, Burlingtoniæ sita; quare decuit ut filius etiam discipulus in illo collegio fieret. Præmium intranti oblatum, qui optime tempus studiis Latinis dedisse videretur, mihi datum est. Post unum annum, quo maxime fruebar, nobilitate tamen Universitatis Yalensis attractus, Novum Portum transivi, ubi post tertium annum ad gradum Baccalaurei in Artibus admissus sum. In hac universitate sodalis societatis Phi

Beta Kappa electus sum. Disciplinam linguarum classicarum sub professoribus Peck, Seymour, Perrin, Wright, Morris, Reynolds, accepi. Anno consequente, cum propius Exoniam esse vellem, Cantabrigiam me recepi, ubi post annum studiis linguarum deditum, sub professoribus Lanman, Allen, White, Morgan, ab inspectoribus Universitatis Harvardianæ ad gradum Magistri in Artibus admissus sum. Proximo anno, qui fuit primus Guilelmi McKinley præsidis, Concordiæ, in re publica Massachusettensi, pueros in parva quadam schola arcana mathematicæ linguarumque Latinæ et Græcæ docebam. Undecim annos qui consecuti sunt Iamaicæ, in maxima urbe Neo-Eboraci, habitavi; quorum per novem magister fui linguarum Latinæ et Græcæ in schola altiore urbana Iamaicæ locata: hos duo annos gradum præceptoris soli secundum obtinui. Studia autem non neglexi: per nonnullos annos itinera ad Universitatem Columbiæ adsidue faciebam, et pro doctrina consilioque professoribus Peck, Perry, Wheeler, Earle, Egbert, McCrea, Young, permulta debeo; quorum primo præcipue, ob hoc opusculum accurate inspectum, gratias summas habeo. Antea octo annis Corneliam Baldwin Colton in matrimonium duxi: illa per aspera cor meum sæpissime firmavit, ut ad hæc iam pervenerim, neque inter adiutores neglegenda est.

MDCCCVIII



I W.











DUE APR 28 '41

~~APR 13~~ 1951

~~MAR 23~~ 1951